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August 2015

35 EUROPEAN LEAGUE PREVIEWS

COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

NEW SEASON SPECIAL

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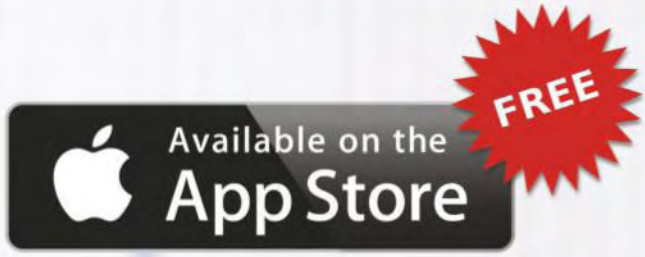

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ARGENTINA...a decision goes against Carlos Tevez on his return to Boca Juniors

TURKEY...Fenerbahce's Fernandao (left) gets to grips with Shakhtar Donetsk's Vyacheslav Shevchuk during a Champions League qualifier

AUSTRALIA...Manchester City's Yaya Toure collides with Real Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas and Sergio Ramos in a pre-season friendly

MEXICO...Jose Francisco Torres of Tigres (right) competes with Internacional's Jorge Valdivia during their Libertadores Cup semi-final

RUSSIA...Zenit players pose for a "selfie" after winning the Russian Super Cup against Lokomotiv Moscow

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to *World Soccer*'s 132-page special preview of the 2015-16 season. Our deadlines have made it impossible to cover all the summer transfers ahead of the window closing at the end of August, but we hope our correspondents around Europe have whetted the appetite with enough information and analysis for the whole season.

While the transfer window's extension into September can prove problematic for *World Soccer*'s internal editorial planning, it must make life incredibly difficult for clubs across the continent. Surely it is time for the window to end on August 1; that would make a lot for sense, creating a level playing field from which everybody would benefit.

> Surely it is time for the window to end on August 1; that would make a lot of sense, creating a level playing field

Despite the window staying open throughout August, there have already been plenty of interesting transfers – and not just in Europe. The situation in China (page 120) is particularly fascinating, while recent moves in Mexico, USA and the Middle East remind us of the perils of being too Euro-centric.

The season ends, however, with the 2016 European Championship in France, the first finals with 24 teams. So Europe will be our priority for the foreseeable future. Enjoy the season!

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 River Plate win the Libertadores Cup ..... page 28
2 Michel Platini announces he will stand for FIFA president ..... page 10
3 Mexico win the Gold Cup ..... page 117
4 Mexico sack coach Miguel Herrera ..... page 13
5 Ajax and Fenerbahce out of Champions League qualifiers .... page 118
6 Bartomeu wins Barcelona election ..... page 92
7 Chelsea sell Petr Cech to Arsenal ..... page 48
8 PSG sign Angel Di Maria from Man United ..... page 54
9 Tunisia hire Henryk Kasperczak ..... page 122
10 Fabio Capello sacked by Russia ..... page 22

Declaration...UEFA president Michel Platini wants to succeed Sepp Blatter

SWITZERLAND

Platini announcement kick-starts FIFA election

UEFA president Michel Platini has confirmed he wants to succeed Sepp Blatter as FIFA president and will stand in the election on February 26.

Platini made his announcement following a series of meetings with key FIFA powerbrokers before the 2016 World Cup draw in St Petersburg, Russia.

"This was a very personal, carefully considered decision, one in which I weighed up the future of football alongside my own future. I was also guided by the esteem, support and encouragement that many of you have shown me," Platini said.

"There are times in life when you have to take your destiny into your own hands.

"I am at one of those decisive moments, at a juncture in my life and in events that are shaping the future of FIFA."

Platini's announcement was followed by a similar declaration of intent by former FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-joon of South Korea.

Prince Ali of Jordan, who stood unsuccessfully against Blatter in May, is considering standing again. Others who have said they plan to stand include former Brazil international Zico and Liberia FA boss Musa Bility.

Candidates must be nominated by five member countries.

"Before the game, he approached me and told me he wants to play in the game. He wanted me to pick him. He wasn't joking. I refused and told him he had done no training...He sacked me soon after"

Ex-Hearts manager Anatoly Korobochka (right) says the club's owner, Vladimir Romanov, wanted him to pick the 60-year-old Lithuanian tycoon for a friendly against Barcelona in July 2007

BRAZIL

Fred failed Copa America dope test

Brazilian midfielder Fred is facing a lengthy ban after he failed a drugs test at the Copa America in Chile in July.

The 22-year-old provided samples which showed traces of the diuretic hydrochlorothiazide, a prohibited substance that can be used as a masking agent for other drugs.

Fred, who plays for Shakhtar Donetsk in Ukraine, appeared in Brazil's first two group games before being dropped for the last match against Venezuela.

Caught..Fred failed a dope test laying for Brazil

Support...Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu

Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu attracted criticism when he selected Fred in the Shakhtar team to play Fenerbahce in a Champions League qualifier.

Lucescu believes the banned substance could have been administered to the midfielder when he was on international duty with Brazil.

"I do not think a guy who can run 13km per game needs pills, but I will avoid commenting on the issue further until the results of the second test are known," commented Lucescu.

"However, it would be very sad if such a young player is suspended for some time."

HEROES & VILLAINS

ANDRES GUARDADO

After scoring the first goal in the CONCACAF Gold Cup Final win against Jamaica, the Mexican became the first player in the tournament's history to score in three Gold Cup Finals, having also found the net against the USA in the 2007 defeat and the same opponents again when Mexico won the cup in 2011.

Gold Cup...Andres Guardado of Mexico

CARLOS RODAS

After beginning his career in 1994, quitting in 2002 to become a taxi driver, and then returning to the game, he came off the bench to score a free-kick at the age of 40 to help Cortalua of Colombia beat Junior Barranquilla for the first time in 11 years.

DAMIEN DUFF

The 36-year-old former Republic of Ireland winger signed an 18-month deal with Shamrock Rovers and is donating all of his wages to the Heart Children Ireland charity.

JAMAICA

Beat the USA 2-1 to become the first Caribbean side to reach the Gold Cup Final. Although they later lost 3-1 to Mexico, coach Winfried Schafer said: "For me this is not silver. For me this is gold. Nobody gave us a shot."

Proud...Winfried Schafer's Jamaica were runners-up

CHELSEA FANS

The five Chelsea fans who were banned from all football for five years after a racism incident on the Paris metro, were also barred for life for attending games at Stamford Bridge.

Ban...Chelsea have barred five fans from Stamford Bridge

SANTOS LAGUNA

The Mexican champions had three players sent off in this season's opening game which they lost 3-1 at home to Leon. Goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin, striker Djaniny Tavares and defender Cesar Ibanez all saw red.

WEST HAM

After qualifying for the Europa League via UEFA's Fair Play system, the Londoners had three players sent off in three qualifying rounds: Diafra Sakho against Lusitans, James Tomkins against Birkirkara and James Collins against Astra Giurgiu – as well as having manager Slaven Bilic sent to the stands in the latter of the three games.

Marching orders... James Collins

PANAMA

Two players were suspended and the country's federation handed an undisclosed fine after their Gold Cup semi-final was held up for 10 minutes as players protested against a penalty that was awarded to Mexico in injury time and denied Panama a famous victory.

"Blatter is like a cannibal eating his parents and then crying he's an orphan. He tries to blame everybody except himself"

South Korea's Chung Mong-joon (left) launches his bid for the FIFA presidency with a stingy attack on the incumbent

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/fWEpp7

1 JONATHAN CALLERI
Boca Juniors v Quilmes
After his first effort is blocked, he produces a fantastic "rabona" to chip the keeper from the rebound.

2 PHILIPPE MEXES
Milan v Internazionale
A spectacular volley from the edge of the 18-yard area – following a corner – flies into the far corner.

3 LUCAS ALARIO
River Plate v Guarani
A well-worked move is finished with an exquisite lob that secures River Plate's place in the Libertadores Cup Final.

4 LUCIANO
Brazil v Panama
A bicycle kick from an acute angle in a 3-3 draw with Panama in the Pan American Games.

5 MIRALEM PJANIC
Roma v Manchester City
A dipping strike from 30 yards gives City keeper Joe Hart no chance in their friendly in Melbourne.

6 ANDREAS ULMER
Salzburg v Malmo
A well-worked corner routine, assisted by a neat flick, is finished with a left-foot strike from the edge of the penalty area.

WINNERS

URUGUAY
Won the Men's Pan American Games title for only the second time thanks to a 1-0 win against Mexico in Canada.

ZAMALEK
Secured their first Egyptian title since 2004 after rivals Al Ahly were held to a draw by Smouha.

ASAMOAH GYAN
On a reported £227,000 a week at China's Shanghai SIPG, making the Ghanaian striker one of the world's best-paid athletes.

LOSERS

USA
The hosts were on the receiving end of a shock elimination by Jamaica in the CONCACAF Gold Cup semi-finals.

ELCHE
The Spanish club failed with a high court appeal against their relegation from La Liga for tax debts.

ABERDEEN
Flew 3,415 miles – a record for a European club game – only to lose 2-1 to Kairat Almaty of Kazakhstan in the Europa League.

"I have finished my work here ...I cannot accept the situation of instability at the club"

Marcelo Bielsa announces his resignation after Marseille lose their Ligue 1 opener at home to Caen

Headliner

Miguel Herrera

Oversees a Gold Cup triumph...and is then sacked for punching a reporter

On July 28, Miguel Herrera was sacked from his position as coach of Mexico's national team. The decision came as a surprise to the world of football – though, in reality, it was the chronicle of a death foretold. Behind the jovial and enthusiastic man who made the planet fall in love with his joyous celebrations in Brazil 2014, there was a dark side that eventually became his undoing.

The day after Mexico won the Gold Cup, Herrera punched Christian Martinoli, a journalist with the television network TV Azteca, at the airport in Philadelphia. The event shocked the Mexican public and, one day later, the new president of the Mexican FA, Decio De Maria, announced the dismissal of a coach who only a year ago was probably the most popular man in the country.

But the incident in the US was the straw that broke the camel's back. In just a few months, he had completely tarnished the excellent image he had made at last year's World Cup and embarked on a dramatic road that took him from hero to pariah.

After Brazil, his face was everywhere and he recorded more than 20 television commercials in almost a year. But when a study by the website juanfutbol.com revealed his revenue since joining "*El Tri*" totalled $8million, fans began to wonder if he was more concerned about his pocket than the welfare of the side.

The first serious problem came on June 7 when, on the eve of the mid-term elections in the country, Herrera published on his Twitter account messages of support for the Green Party – something that is explicitly prohibited by law.

The backlash was enormous and Herrera was criticized by journalists and fans alike, and his image took a hit from which it would never recover.

Mexico then failed in the Copa America and made a bad start of the Gold Cup, finishing second in their group behind Trinidad & Tobago. The situation got even worse in the knockout stage and they only beat Costa Rica and Panama thanks to highly debatable penalty calls in the final minutes of both games.

Herrera was under siege and one of his fiercest critics was Martinoli, perhaps the most influential pundit in the country, who repeatedly suggested the coach should be fired. Herrera, whose volatile temper is well known, called him "*un pendejo*" (an arsehole) and threatened to "settle their differences when they met".

However, nobody thought the coach would carry out his threat; even less so after Mexico deservedly beat Jamaica 3-1 in the Final to significantly decrease the pressure on Herrera's shoulders.

Yet a day later, when he bumped into Martinoli in check-in area of the airport, the coach could not contain his temper and hit the reporter in the neck. To add insult to injury, a few seconds later, Herrera's daughter slapped Martinoli's commentating partner, former Mexican international Luis Garcia.

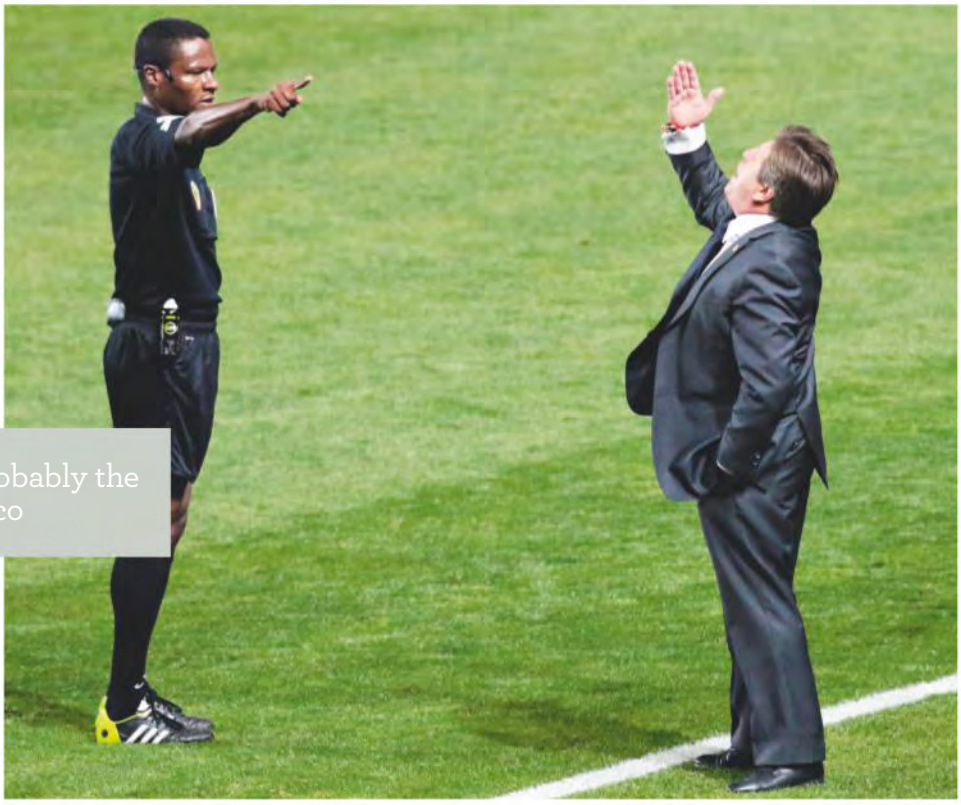
It was no surprise to anyone that Herrera was fired the next day, but his dismissal leaves the Mexican FA with a huge problem.

The national team face the USA on October 10 in a play-off for a place at the 2017 Confederations Cup in Russia, while qualifiers for the following year's finals begin this November – all of which means that there is little time to find a quality replacement for Herrera.

Argentinian coach Marcelo Bielsa, who quit Marseille only the opening day of the French season, was an early favourite for the post, but whoever gets the job will be hard pressed to have the team ready for those important matches.

Martin Del Palacio Langer

A year ago, Herrera was probably the most popular man in Mexico



Controversial...Herrera remonstrates with a referee during this year's Copa America

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Chung is a serious contender

Chung Mong-joon, the man who snatched a share of World Cup hosting for South Korea in 2002, intends to stand for the FIFA presidency in the election in Zurich on February 26, 2016. On the face of it, he is a rank outsider, having been absent from the FIFA arena for four years. But the lesson of FIFA history is that no one should underrate the 63-year-old scion of the vast Hyundai empire.

Already Chung is not pulling any punches. With Michel Platini the only other declared runner so far, he insists the world federation needs a fresh approach after the scandal-twisted downward spiral under Sepp Blatter.

"It won't be easy," says the South Korean billionaire. "But I think it would be worth it and there could be good results if I try hard enough. If I get elected, my job is not to enjoy the luxury of the office. My job is to change it.

"It will be very difficult for Mr Platini to have any meaningful reforms. Mr Platini enjoys institutional support from the current structure of FIFA; he is very much a product of the current system. It is time that FIFA had a non-European leadership. FIFA became a closed organisation for president Blatter, his associates and his cronies. I want to change that."

Money is not the issue – whatever may be revealed eventually as the remuneration of the FIFA president – as Forbes estimates Chung's net worth at $1.2billion. And his qualifications go far beyond football, as a graduate of Seoul National University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Johns Hopkins University.

Platini wasted comparatively little time in issuing his own declaration of candidacy, but Chung will not have been concerned. He knows all about hunting down early front runners – whether they be the French president of UEFA, old South American stars Zico and Diego Maradona, or Liberian federation president Musa Bility.

The initial barrier all must surmount is the need to garner nomination support from at least five national associations by the October 26 deadline and to have served in a football role for two of the last five years.

Since Chung is an honorary vice-president of FIFA the latter issue should not be a problem, and the influence of both World Cup sponsor Hyundai and the South Korean federation should ensure at least four other signatory supporters. After that, events back in the early 1990s should caution Platini and his supporters about Chung.

Opponent...Chung wants to be FIFA's next president

Back then, Japan was out on its own in seeking to bring the World Cup to Asia for the first time, having been touted by Stanley Rous in the 1960s and early 1970s, and endorsed – because of its raft of World Cup sponsors – by FIFA presidential successor Joao Havelange.

> "If I get elected, my job is not to enjoy the luxury of the office. My job is to change it"
>
> **Chung Mong-joon**

But the historic antipathy between Japan and their Korean neighbours sparked a rivalry which overflowed into world football. Match that with the political ambitions of the newly arrived Chung as South Korean FA president and the political and bidding landscape changed overnight.

Chung and his Koreans bid late but aggressively for 2002 and he built powerful allies within Havelange-hating UEFA. Havelange, who had expected a walkover vote within the FIFA ExCo for Japan, was confronted with the prospect of a dangerous schism; hence he came up with the proposal of a co-hosted World Cup.

For the Japanese this was a humiliating defeat; for Chung and South Korea it was a devastating victory. For FIFA, it was an administrative nightmare. As Blatter, then general secretary, complained months down the road: "We can't even get the Japanese and Koreans to agree on a meeting date."

In the end national pride on both sides produced an exemplary staging of a co-hosted World Cup, even if each virtually ignored the other's role. Chung's own self-promotion within the battle saw him installed as the Asian confederation's FIFA vice-president, defeating a Japanese opponent. That was his foundation to fight political wars of his own against Mohamed bin Hammam, Qatari president of the AFC and, later, against Blatter within FIFA.

Even while Havelange was still president of FIFA, Chung had asked, during an executive committee meeting, for more transparency about the federation's finances. How much, for example, was the president paid? Havelange was furious, reportedly thumping the table with his fist in anger at being challenged. Later, after Havelange was succeeded by Blatter, Chung

raised the issue again only to be shot down by several fellow ExCo members.

That did not deter Chung. He just had to wait for his moment. Another arose in early 2007 after the infamous court case which left FIFA paying out in a settlement for cancelling MasterCard's World Cup sponsorship to sign up, instead, with Visa. As Chung wrote years later: "In a ruling full of contempt for FIFA, the judge mentioned the word 'lie' 13 times. Blatter ascribed all the responsibility to Jerome Valcke [then head of FIFA Marketing]."

Furious, Chung sought critical support among his ExCo colleagues before their next meeting but in vain. So he determined to go it alone, stating: "At our meeting, Blatter mentioned it only briefly, saying it was handled well and done with. I said in the meeting that it was not only a matter of money but was serious that FIFA suffered even worse damage to its credibility and reputation."

In 2009 Chung stepped down from his presidency of the South Korean federation to invest more time in politics and business. Then, in December 2010, South Korea's bid for a lone hosting of the World Cup came up badly short. South Korea was eliminated in the third round of voting with only five of the 22 votes.

Blatter took this result as a clear sign of a weakening of Chung's influence and, within weeks, seized his chance to rid himself of this troublesome Korean.

In early 2011 Chung was standing for re-election as the AFC's FIFA vice-president. This time Blatter threw his weight behind his Jordanian rival, Prince Ali bin Al Hussein. Even bin Hammam supported Chung but their unholy alliance lacked credibility. Chung was ousted from FIFA, after 17 years, by 25 votes to 20. His consolation – and to assure the continuing sponsorship revenues of Hyundai – was a lifetime honorary vice-presidency.

Bin Hammam was probably secretly delighted. With Chung out of the way he had a clear run to try to oust Blatter as FIFA president. But that collapsed after the notorious Port of Spain campaign conference with Jack Warner's Caribbean Football Union. Blatter, Chung's old and new enemy, was left in unchallenged command.

Of course, Chung had always entertained greater ambitions than mere football. He had always wanted to play a central role on the Korea political stage. In the run-up to the 2002 World Cup he had hoped to use the lure of hosting finals matches to open doors toward reunification with North Korea. Then he could go on to pursue the country's presidency. In the event he was snubbed, not only the North Koreans in football but later by South Koreans at the ballot box.

With nothing to lose, Chung vented his frustration in an autobiography, entitled *My Challenge, My Passion*. Much of the book was taken up with exacting revenge on political opponents. But he also devoted a chapter entitled "FIFA, more politics than football" to lay into Blatter and co, describing the FIFA president as "an articulate and intelligent man but more of an impetuous child than a gentleman".

Chung wrote: "The executive committee is meant to provide checks and balances when its president goes beyond his authority and mandate. But Blatter tries to minimise the power of the executive committee and thereby neutralise any efforts to check his power... A lot of dictators on this planet have used similar methods."

Winner...Prince Ali beat Chung in a vote for the AFC presidency

Now, with Blatter stepping down, Chung must work hard to make up for four lost years on the FIFA fringe. But he has the money for the campaign and a sharp political nose.

He will have understood that AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa noted Platini's candidacy but stopped short of endorsing it; he will have understood that most of Africa bitterly resents what it consider UEFA's coup against Blatter; he will know that other federations are open to persuasion.

Chung's prospects – in any fight – should never, ever be discounted. WS

'FIFA-GATE' TIMELINE

JULY 20
Zurich: FIFA's ExCo names February 26 as the date for the extraordinary elective congress. Sepp Blatter says he wants a reform task force led by an "independent personality" comprising members chosen by the six regional confederations. His press conference is interrupted by prankster Simon Brodkin, who showers him with fake dollar bills.
Amman: Prince Ali bin Al Hussein, defeated by Blatter in the election in May, says the 79-year-old Swiss should step down with immediate effect.

JULY 21
Seoul: Chung Mong-joon, FIFA's former Asian vice-president, says he is preparing to stand to succeed Blatter.

JULY 22
Santa Cruz: Bolivia federation president Carlos Chavez – also treasurer of CONMEBOL – and general-secretary Alberto Lozada are remanded on corruption charges.
San Francisco: A planned friendly between Brazil and Argentina in September is cancelled because of the corruption scandal fallout.

Non-starter...a friendly between Argentina and Brazil

JULY 23
Asuncion: Paraguayan authori ties confirm receiving an extradition application from the US for former CONMEBOL president Nicolas Leoz.
St Petersburg: Sepp Blatter arrives on his first trip abroad since the May 27 dawn raids in Zurich for the World Cup qualifying draw.

JULY 24
St Petersburg: FIFA secretary-general Jerome Valcke says he expects to be leaving along with Blatter after the new presidential election.

JULY 25
St Petersburg: Russian president Vladimir Putin and Blatter share the stage at the World Cup draw.

JULY 27
Zurich: FIFA's audit and compliance chairman Domenico Scala insists he will not lead the reform task force.

JULY 29
Nyon: Michel Platini, French president of UEFA, announces he will stand for the FIFA presidency.

JULY 31
Rio De Janeiro: The Brazilian confederation says it will support Zico's FIFA presidency bid if he can obtain four other federation nominations.

AUGUST 1
New York: Alejandro Burzaco, the Argentinian who was chairman of sports marketing company Torneos y Competencias (TyC), is released on bail after denying court charges of corruption.

AUGUST 3
Kuala Lumpur: Olympic president Thomas Bach says Blatter has formally resigned as a member of the IOC. Blatter would have had to step down on reaching 80 next spring.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Goalkeepers are still free to foul, maim and injure

Brutal...Germany goalkeeper Harald Schumacher clatters into Patrick Battiston of France in the 1982 World Cup

Back in my teenage years (so we're in the 1940s), me and my young friends knew everything about football. Everything. We argued a lot, of course, and one thing we never agreed on was the offence of obstruction. Odd, really, given that the calls were not that frequent, and usually inconsequential.

But obstruction seemed capable of almost any interpretation. Jumping forward 50 years, we come to 1995, when the word "obstruction" was banished from the rules and replaced by "impeding the progress of an opponent" - or just plain impeding.

This could hardly be interpreted as an attempt to clarify things, for nothing else changed – the same mystifying offence, but with a new name. Or maybe not, for the "Additional Instructions" section of the 1996 rule book had not got the message and still used the word "obstruction" – particularly when explaining the singular offence of obstructing a goalkeeper at corner kicks.

That section of the rule book may not have caught up with the name-change, but it did reflect a huge change in the game itself. Why was it considered necessary to single out this offence and give it special emphasis?

The apotheosis of the goalkeeper into Mr Untouchable was under way. Here was an unequivocal declaration that he was to get special protection at corners. He was not to be obstructed – and it was specifically stated that the protection applied "before the kick is taken and before the ball is in play".

No mention was made of the possibility that the goalkeeper might himself be guilty of obstructing opposing players as they sought to play the ball.

The wording was eventually adjusted, in 2002, to "impeding" the goalkeeper. By 2007 the rule-makers seem to have become aware that they needed to acknowledge that non-goalkeepers also had some rights in situations where impeding might be called. An explanatory note appeared in the "Guidelines" section of the rule book, stating: "All players have a right to their position on the field of play, being in the way of an opponent is not the same as moving into the way of an opponent."

> The notion has taken root that, when a goalkeeper runs forward to get the ball, he's entitled to clean out anyone in his way

A statement that severely weakened the earlier statement that impeding at corner kicks could occur before the ball was in play. If five opponents chose to position themselves around the goalkeeper, boxing him in – but without moving – how was that now impeding?

Well, it just was. The impeding rule continued to be applied as one-sidedly as ever, with goalkeepers getting virtually all the calls. They got additional help from the rule-makers when, in 2009, a small change in wording – the addition of just two letters, "e.g." – made it clear that the ban on impeding the keeper involved more than corner kicks. Under the new wording – "impeding the goalkeeper, e.g. at the taking of a corner kick" – corner-kick play was merely an example, one of various other, unspecified, situations where the goalkeeper was to receive what already looked like privileged treatment.

This was really inexplicable. In 1982, German keeper Harald Schumacher's frightening assault on Frenchman Patrick Battiston gave a brutal warning of the dangers posed by reckless goalkeepers.

Goalkeeper assaults on opponents became a common occurrence and were usually dealt with by awarding a free-kick against the victim – for impeding. A prime example was Manuel Neuer's crude foul on Gonzalo Higuain in last year's World Cup Final. Referee Nicola Rizzoli managed to turn what should have been a red card for Neuer and a penalty to Argentina, into a foul by Higuain – though he did later admit that was wrong, saying that there had been no foul by either player.

That's where we are now. Goalkeepers are allowed to charge, knee up, fists raised, into a crowd of players, to commit mayhem, to injure opponents – and sometimes their own team-mates – with impunity.

The notion has taken root that when a goalkeeper runs forward to get the ball, he must get it, that he's entitled to clean out anyone who is in his way. That is called good – and frequently "brave" – goalkeeping. It is also utterly reckless, and it usually involves excessive force – the two most serious of soccer's sins. No outfield player would be allowed to get away with that sort of play.

It is surely way past time for goalkeepers to be reined in, for the rule-makers to work out a way of banning this recklessness while still ensuring that goalkeepers get the protection that their unique position warrants. WS

"It was horrible, terrifying, shameful. The club has to make a decision because, with the players we have got, it's not working"

Rayo Vallecano coach Paco vents his fury after a 5-0 loss to second-tier Albacete in a pre-season friendly

Notebook

Highlights from some of our regular on-line contributions

SPAIN

Jackson Martinez was late, but he did eventually arrive at Barajas airport from Bogota. At just under €37million, he is the second-most expensive player in Atletico Madrid's history, after his countryman Radamel Falcao.

"Falcao's Falcao and I'm me," said Martinez, and the expectation was huge, with fans gathered at the airport to greet him. Officially signed on July 15, he was due at Atletico's training camp on July 19 July. On arriving there two days later, he said: "Anyone who doesn't know about Atletico doesn't know about football."

Meanwhile, Luis Suarez scored for Barcelona against Los Angeles Galaxy and against his old friend Steven Gerrard. It was Barca's first game of pre-season and also, according to Suarez; "The first time in six years that I have has had a full break and complete pre-season."

Sid Lowe

Attention... Martinez (centre)

ITALY

Perhaps the most important aspect of Fiorentina's 2-1 friendly win against Barcelona was not so much the result but the fact that the game marked yet another important moment in the ongoing recovery of injury-prone Giuseppe Rossi.

The former Manchester United striker played for the entire second half of the game – his first action at the Stadio Artemio Franchi since May 18 of last year.

It may be early days, but Rossi looks to be on the right road and Fiorentina fans unfurled a banner which read: "Welcome back, 'Pepito'. The setting sun always rises again and a true warrior comes back to celebrate at the Fiesole Kop".

Paddy Agnew

Welcome return...injury-hampered Rossi (right)

Crossroads...Shaqiri could be going to Dortmund

GERMANY

Bild's deep throat at Dortmund has informed the tabloid of the Westfalen outfit's interest in Internazionale's Swiss attacking midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri.

The story goes that the Dortmunder and the 23-year-old have already agreed personal terms, but the deal is being held up by the insistence of new coach Thomas Tuchel that his arrival be offset by a departure.

One possibility for the chop could be German under-21 midfielder Moritz Leitner, who recently returned to the Ruhr following a disappointing two-year loan stint at Stuttgart. Another is Polish right-winger, "Kuba" Blaszczykowski, who has been injured too often in the last couple of seasons.

Courted this summer by Schalke and various Premier League sides, Shaqiri is at a career crossroads and desperately needs to reassert his headlining credentials after three years as a bit-part player at Bayern Munich and a disastrous time at Inter – who he joined to great fanfare in January, only to quickly fizzle out.

Nick Bidwell

Weekly notes from Brazil, Spain, Germany and Italy at **worldsoccer.com**

"It is very important to debut with a victory. I didn't know if I would be able to manage the whole 90 minutes but I am very happy"

Ronaldinho on his first game for Fluminense

Headliner

Ronaldinho is battling time

Fluminense are the 35-year-old former World Player of the Year's latest club

The past nine years of Ronaldinho's professional life were summed up in his first 90 minutes for his latest club.

The former World Player of the Year had been presented to fans of Fluminense at a previous game in Rio a fortnight earlier. A big crowd had turned out for the occasion, and an inspired Ronaldinho declared himself raring to go. However, he neglected to add that it would be some eight days before he actually made it to training, as part of the deal he agreed with the club was that he would be granted two weeks' holiday straight away.

Since he had not played since the end of May, with Queretaro in Mexico, this was yet more evidence that getting the most out of the Brazilian's extraordinary talent is not at the top of his own list of priorities – something that would seem to have been the case for some time.

In hindsight, it is almost tragically comic that going into the 2006 World Cup the Brazilian media was full of speculation that this would be the tournament where Ronaldinho would prove himself better than Pele. It is now evident that the world had already seen the best of a player who had only just turned 26.

In the subsequent years he has been a pale and immobile shadow of the joyful youngster who thrilled the planet in the pre-Pep Guardiola Barcelona days. Indeed, Guardiola's decision to get rid of him in 2008 stands revealed as a masterstroke. As Barca went from strength to strength, Ronaldinho – drifting from Italy to Brazil, Mexico and now back to Brazil – has never come remotely close to the standards he set previously.

The physical decline was immediately apparent in his first game for Fluminense, which, as fate would have it, was against Gremio of Porto Alegre, where his career began in the late 1990s. With World Cup centre-forward Fred injured, Ronaldinho started the game in a false-nine role, which mainly seemed to be a way of setting up the team without giving him marking responsibilities. He did pick up a second-half yellow card for a sliding tackle, but there was an air of playing to the gallery about the incident, since it would clearly be foolish to expect an intense participation in the game from a player who has not lived as an athlete.

But this is no ordinary player. Even lamentably short of fitness, Ronaldinho is capable of producing the odd moment when he stamps his quality on the match – providing he can find enough space to work his magic. Over the last few years he has tended to drift over to the left, where he seeks the room to launch long, diagonal passes. Surround him with pace and a centre-forward adept at playing with his back to goal – at least in Brazil, where the defences lie deep and space is easier to come by – and he can still be useful.

There were snatches of quality in the Maracana, especially after Gremio had midfielder Walace sent off early in the second half. It opened up more space – which was surely part of the explanation for keeping Ronaldinho on the field for the full 90 minutes. It worked, too. Inside the last 15 minutes he helped set up the only goal of the game. His raking long ball was nodded on by substitute centre-forward Wellington Paulista, who had a bizarre spell with West Ham United a couple of seasons ago, and Marcos Junior rounded the goalkeeper to score.

So, the crowd went home happy, Fluminense moved to third in the table, behind Atletico Mineiro and Corinthians, and some supporters may have gone home dreaming that the acquisition of Ronaldinho will take them higher still.

But this is where it becomes problematic because he is unlikely to be able to produce on a regular and consistent basis.

At the age of 35, there is only so much gas in the tank, even if his main priorities lay elsewhere. There will doubtless be flashes of genius and moments of frustration, but there is only ever one winner in the race between time and footballing talent, especially when the player concerned has done so much to push the clock forward.

Tim Vickery

"The goal is to be champions. We know it will be hard but we will fight all the way"

Fluminense's Ronaldinho

Expectations...Ronaldinho (in orange) acknowledges Fluminense supporters during his first training session with his new club

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"Only three people have silenced the Maracana: the Pope, Frank Sinatra and me"

Alcides Ghiggia

OBITUARIES

The man who bamboozled Brazil

Alcides GHIGGIA (1926–2015)
The Uruguayan football legend died on the 65th anniversary of the shock 2-1 World Cup victory over Brazil in which he struck the winning goal.

Until Brazil's 7-1 humiliation by Germany at last year's World Cup, the "*Maracanazao*" of 1950 had been the greatest symbol of shame in their sporting history. Yet, in later years, Ghiggia always received a generous welcome on his visits.

His place in football history was secured on July 16, 1950. The giant new Maracana in Rio de Janeiro had been built with the specific expectation that Brazil would be crowned world champions in front of 200,000 of their own fans.

With Brazil needing only a draw because the concluding stage was a mini-league, and Uruguay having to win, no one doubted the outcome. One newspaper printed a poster, three days before the game, with a picture of the Brazilian team proclaimed as "Champions of the World". Some Uruguayan directors were so convinced of the outcome that they left for home the day before the game.

Brazil went close to scoring three times in the first five minutes, but by half-time it was still goalless. Then, two minutes after the restart, left-winger Friaca put the hosts ahead.

With a packed Maracana happily cheering Brazil to victory, Uruguay equalised in the 66th minute through their great inside-forward Juan Schiaffino. No worries; a draw was still sufficient.

Ready...Ghiggia before the dramatic finale against Brazil

But then disaster struck as Uruguay broke away. Julio Perez released right-winger Ghiggia, who outpaced defender Bigode, cut into the penalty box and shaped to cross. Goalkeeper Moacir Barbosa threw his weight onto his right foot and stepped forward in anticipation ...so the alert Ghiggia drove the ball between the keeper and his near post.

Brazil, who were now shattered, could barely pass the ball between each other, let alone amount a serious attack in the time remaining.

The final whistle from English referee George Reader signalled victory for Uruguay and a string of reported heart-attack deaths both inside the stadium and across the country.

Ghiggia played for a further three years in Uruguay and then spent a decade in Italy, with Roma and Milan. In the days of travel travails, foreign-based players were largely written off by their own national teams so he ended his career with a mere four goals in 12 international matches, all scored in that 1950 World Cup.

Back in Brazil to attend the World Cup last year, he said: "People here love their football above all else. They don't hold grudges. I feel very proud of being Uruguayan but I also respect Brazil a great deal. It's a country full of joy, they welcome you with open arms so for me it's beautiful to be here.

"After all, this is football – people win and people lose, and that event at Maracana was what it was. The Brazilians were sad at the time but they have won five World Cups since then so I'm happy for them."

In 1950 Uruguay had opened their campaign by winning 8-0 against Bolivia, with Ghiggia scoring the eighth goal at the Estadio Independencia in Belo Horizonte – which later proved England's football graveyard against the United States. He also scored in the 2-2 draw with Spain and again in a 3-2 win against Sweden.

The subsequent winning goal in Maracana made him the first man to score in every possible match in a finals – 20 years before Brazil's Jairzinho did the same in Mexico.

Keir Radnedge

Memories...Ghiggia displays a shirt commemorating his 1950 World Cup exploits

Dick NANNINGA (1949–2015)
Along with Johan Neeskens, who scored a penalty against West Germany in 1974, he is one of only two players to score in a World Cup Final for Holland, coming on as a substitute and equalising in 1978 before Argentina eventually won 3-1 in extra-time. He won 15 caps, scoring six goals, and spent most of his career with Roda and Maastricht, plus a spell in Hong Kong.

Record...centre (18) scored in a World Cup Final

Cecil JONES ATTUQUAYEFIO (1944–2015)
A member of Ghana's African Nations Cup winning team in 1965 and the African Champions League as coach of Hearts of Oak in 1998, he also served as a vice-president of the Ghana Football Association and deputy general secretary.

Hassan AL SHAZLY (1943–2015)
Egypt's all-time leading league scorer with 171 goals, he spent his entire career at Tersana and was top scorer at the 1963 African Nations Cup tournament.

John MOSHOEU (1965–2015)
Known as "Shoes", the midfielder was an African Nations Cup winner with South Africa in 1996 and capped 73 times, scoring eight goals. He spent 10 years in Turkey with Fenerbahce before returning to his homeland, where he played until the age of 42.

Stalwart...Moshoeu

Joseph MWEPU ILUNGA (1949–2015)
Zaire's right-back at the 1974 World Cup whose comical kicking away of a Brazilian free-kick came to embody the perceived naivety of the first black African side to appear at the tournament.

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Raheem Sterling on turning down Liverpool's offer of £100,000 a week to join Manchester City – for around double that figure

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Guillermo Amor... appointed at Adelaide United

EUROPE

RAHEEM STERLING became the 13th-most expensive player of all time when he joined Manchester City from Liverpool for £49million. For all the other big summer moves in Europe's top five leagues, go to **www.worldsoccer.com**

BERND STORCK was appointed coach of Hungary for their remaining Euro 2016 qualifiers.

Former Barcelona midfielder **GERARD LOPEZ** followed in the footsteps of Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique by taking charge of the Camp Nou club's reserve side.

Former Australia international **HARRY KEWELL**, 36, was appointed coach of Premier League Watford's under-21 side.

SOUTH AMERICA

Following his release by Mexican side Queretaro, **RONALDINHO** joined Fluminense until the end of 2016.

Former Uruguay captain **DIEGO LUGANO** signed for Cerro Porteno of Paraguay after being released by Sweden side Hacken.

CONCACAF

Los Angeles Galaxy signed Mexico international **GIOVANI DOS SANTOS** from Villarreal of Spain,

Euro task...Storck takes charge of Hungary

37-year-old Ivorian striker **DIDIER DROGBA** joined Montreal Impact after leaving Chelsea, and **SHAUN WRIGHT-PHILLIPS** joined his younger brother, Bradley, at New York Red Bulls following his release by QPR.

AFRICA

Caretaker coach **ERNEST MTAWALI** was given a permanent contract to lead Malawi.

Smouha, who are the only Egyptian club in the group stage of the CAF Champions League, replaced interim boss Mimi Abdelrazak with former Al Ahly coach **MOHAMED YOUSSEF**.

ASIA

GIANFRANCO ZOLA was appointed coach of seven-time Qatari champions Al Arabi.

Brazil striker **ROBINHO** joined Chinese Super League side Guangzhou Evergrande, signing an initial six-month contract.

Iraq under-23 coach **YAHYA ALWAN** was put in charge of the senior national side after former Qatar boss Dzemal Hadziabdic changed his mind over accepting the appointment.

Former Barcelona midfielder **GUILLERMO AMOR** replaced Josep Gombau as coach of A-League side Adelaide United.

Northern Ireland defender **AARON HUGHES** joined A-League side Melbourne City on a one-year deal.

Impact...Drogba (centre) has joined Montreal in MLS

OUT

EUROPE

Uruguayan **SERGIO MARKARIAN** quit as coach of Greece's national team after just five months in charge.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Argentina international **PABLO AIMAR** announced his retirement from playing after failing to earn a place in River Plate's squad for the semi-final stage of the Libertadores Cup.

CONCACAF

El Salvador coach **ALBERT ROCA** resigned after his side were eliminated in the group stage at the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

AFRICA

Defending Nigerian champions Kano Pillars, who are struggling in the league this season, sacked coach **OKEY EMORDI**.

ASIA

Guangzhou R&F sacked Romanian coach **COSMIN CONTRA** after one win in 13 Chinese Super League games.

J.League side Kashima Antlers parted company with Brazilian coach **TONINHO CEREZO**.

Ex-Portugal striker **HELDER POSTIGA**, who was with Spain's Deportivo La Coruna last season, joined as Indian Super League side Atletico de Kolkata.

Left out... Pablo Aimar

Pay-off...Capello leaves with £11m

Capello sacked as coach of Russia

Fabio Capello was dismissed as coach by 2018 World Cup hosts Russia. The Italian, who was earning a reported £6.8million a year, had gone unpaid for eight months due to financial problems.

Capello was appointed in 2012 and had agreed a contract extension until 2018. The sacking means he will be entitled to receive £11million compensation.

In June, Russia were beaten 1-0 at home by Austria in the Euro 2016 qualifiers.

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Least worst...Platini

Platini, the underwhelming choice

The best you can say about Michel Platini is that he is probably the least worst. And by comparison with his predecessors Joao Havelange and Sepp Blatter, a veritable angel of light. But to hear the plaudits visited upon him by the euphemistic head of the Football Association, Greg Dyke, you might think that a knight in shining armour had arrived.

According to Dyke: "Mr Platini had always made it very clear that he voted for Qatar. If all the other people who voted for Qatar had been quite as transparent it would have been more helpful."

Eh? Read that again and try to make sense of it. To vote for Qatar at all, initially as a summer tournament, in heat of 50 degrees centigrade, seemed outrageous, but Platini did. Then to go along, as he did, with the shift to a winter tournament, to the chaotic disadvantage of the clubs he is meant to represent in Europe seemed a betrayal of his responsibilities. No, there never has been any hint of malfeasance.

The preferred explanation had been that Platini was heavily leaned upon by the then president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, who had the mineral interests of his country in mind. But in that case, surely the decent thing to do was either to ignore the pressure or in the last analysis to resign. Platini did neither.

Yet if you look around for an alternative presidential candidate, you will surely look in vain.

Meanwhile, Jerome Valcke, chief executive to Blatter, has graciously informed us that he too will be going when Blatter does.

Not a moment too soon, one might say.

Glenn, the FA's mystery man

The Football Association blunders on, ill served as ever by its clumsy hierarchy. The recently appointed chief executive is someone called Martin Glenn. Search in vain for his background in football...

One of his major claims to fame is his successful promotion of Walker's Crisps, thanks in no small part to Gary Lineker – who, to do him credit, has matured into a formidable television pundit.

Tact seems hardly Mr Glenn's greatest virtue. When Roy Hodgson recently suggested that he should be maintained in England office until after the forthcoming European Championship finals, Mr Glenn bluntly declared not only that he should wait until after the tournament, but that the suspense could motivate Hodgson to "go the extra yard" – whatever that may mean.

> Mr Glenn declared that the suspense could motivate Hodgson to "go the extra yard" – whatever that may mean

While fully in agreement that it would be mistaken to re-appoint Hodgson until we see what happens in the Euros, I deplore the tactless insensitivity of Glenn – another Platini man, by the way.

Crisp? No, anything but.

Promotion...Martin Glenn (left) with Gary Lineker (centre)

With friends like Putin...

As might have been expected when the World Cup draw was made in St Petersburg, Russian president Putin and FIFA president Blatter got on all too horribly and predictably well.

Putin even suggested that Blatter deserved a Nobel prize, something Blatter himself has been ogling for a fair few years. Alas for Blatter the appropriate committee has long since decided that he is not in the running.

Shades of the way that superb performer Tom Lehrer gave up on satire when he learned that Henry Kissinger had been award that prize.

Duo...Blatter (left) and Putin in St Petersburg

Russia, a disaster in waiting

Is it truly too late to take the World Cup away from Russia? The full infamy of awarding the tournament to them was all too recently emphasised by the grim case of Emmanuel Frimpong.

Once as Arsenal midfielder, now playing for a lesser Russian team, Ufa, the Ghanaian was subjected to monkey chants when he played against Moscow Spartak. At a certain moment, foolishly he admits, he retorted with a one-finger gesture. He was sent off and subsequently banned for two matches, while the Spartak louts were neither punished nor even admonished.

Frimpong went on to criticise the staging of a World Cup in Russia, where African teams will be involved.

Another sufferer has been the more prominent Hulk, the black Brazilian international centre-forward, who has complained that as a Zenit player he has been subject to sustained racist taunts. Chosen to take part in the World Cup draw, he was surprisingly withdrawn at short notice by Zenit manager Andre Villas-Boas on flimsy grounds. Why, it was wondered, Villas-Boas' decision to take him to a distant club match come so late?

One is reminded of the remarks of the Dutch veteran coach Dick Advocaat, who said that when he was managing Zenit he did not dare sign a black player.

Winner...Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain beats Chelsea keeper Courtois at Wembley

A tale of two keepers

The Community Shield at Wembley between Arsenal and Chelsea provided a fascinating contrast and an intriguing sub-plot with goalkeepers Petr Cech and Thibaut Courtois.

On this occasion, the veteran Cech had the better of it, helping his new club, Arsenal, to beat Jose Mourinho's Chelsea.

At the other end, the much younger Courtois had on the whole rather more saves to make than Cech, though Arsenal in the second half decided to counter-attack. Fair's fair. They have been doing that since, under Herbert Chapman, they introduced the third-back game with its breakaway style as long ago as 1925.

Not that it stopped them freely scoring. I remember Cliff Bastin, their prolific outside-left who once got 33 goals in a single league season, once telling me that when Arsenal had a lot of the play, they'd get worried.

As for Chelsea under Mourinho, surely for all their luminous stars they have often been seen as a counter-attacking team themselves.

I can well understand Mourinho being reluctant to let Cech go to Arsenal; John Terry has claimed that he could earn the Gunners an extra 15 points.

But surely the Chelsea billionaire owner, Roman Abramovich, did the decent thing in allowing Cech to cross London – for £10million, which may yet prove a true bargain. Cech and his family didn't want to go abroad, and last season he made a mere half dozen appearances for Chelsea in the Premier League.

United's De Gea dilemma

Speaking of goalkeepers, just as Chelsea and Arsenal seem so well served by their towering keepers, Manchester United have a previously unexpected crisis. Last season, David De Gea, another towering figure, and at 24 just a year older than Courtois, saved United a good many points with his courage and agility.

But then along came Real Madrid – for whose historic rival club Atletico Madrid he had cut his teeth – and declared an interest. It soon grew plain that De Gea was all too keen to go. All too very keen you might say as his form on United's American tour so precipitately dropped.

He had a really poor game when they were well beaten by Paris Saint-Germain – and it was all too obvious that his heart was not in it.

Wantaway...De Gea

Read Brian Glanville's exclusive online column at worldsoccer.com

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eye witness

Joel Richards reports from Buenos Aires

ARGENTINA

River's resurrection men

River Plate cap a remarkable revival by winning their third Libertadores Cup

Champions...River Plate celebrate winning the 2015 Libertadores Cup

ANDES
AMERICA MDEEM

After the lap of honour and the official photos with the trophy, River Plate players donned T-shirts especially made for the occasion. The inscription, loosely translated, read: "You Don't Abandon a Style of Play." The quote is loaded with meaning for River as it taps into the club's past and present. It is also a taunt at their great rivals, Boca Juniors.

Tigres of Mexico were dispatched 3-0 on aggregate in the Final, but the springboard for River Plate's third Libertadores Cup success was victory over Boca in the round of 16. Boca were expelled from the competition after a small group of supporters sprayed River Plate players with a homemade pepper spray. Since then, River fans have taunted their neighbours with a chant about "giving up" or "abandoning". River's players have also been filmed singing the song.

But this Libertadores triumph is about a far bigger picture than settling scores in

Determined...River's Nicolas Bertolo (right)

a local rivalry. For River, this is a moment of unadulterated glory that crowns a stunning 18 months. It completes the club's resurrection after its lowest point four years ago and brings to an end two decades without winning the continent's most important title. The torrential rain in Buenos Aires on the night only added an extra element of the epic to the title win.

In May 2014, River Plate were Argentinian league champions and they went on to win the domestic Super Cup under Ramon Diaz. Although the coach then quit, River Plate president Rodolfo D'Onofrio assured supporters "this has only just started". Sports director Enzo Francescoli pushed for Marcelo Gallardo, the young coach and former River Plate player, to replace Diaz and the board heeded the Uruguayan's choice, despite preferring more experienced alternatives.

Under Gallardo, River immediately produced a stylish brand of play. They won the Sudamericana Cup, also defeating Boca Juniors along the way, and then won the South American Super Cup – making them the first club to hold of all three continental trophies at the same time.

With silverware in the trophy cabinet, a strong squad, a clear identity of play and a healthy bank balance, this was all in stark contrast to the club's recent history.

Four years ago, River Plate were in the second tier. Disastrous administrations had lead the club to relegation and the institution was in complete disarray. For that season, former youth-team product Fernando Cavenaghi returned, offering to play for whatever the club could afford. The striker was captain and top scorer in River's worst-ever season, and his gesture of returning to the club when it most needed him made him a club icon.

Cavenaghi had been struggling with form and fitness this year, and was behind other strikers at the club. Yet injury to Rodrigo Mora allowed him to start the second leg of the Libertadores Final against Tigres, along with three fellow veterans of the campaign in the second division: Leo Ponzio, Jonathan Maiadana, and one of the goalscorers on the night, Carlos Sanchez. In these players, but in Cavenaghi in particular, was the story of River's transformation.

Along with Sanchez, the other two goalscorers from the 3-0 win over Tigres also explain part of the story.

Lucas Alario was a virtually unknown striker at Colon when signed by Gallardo. His first start for the club was in the semi-final against Guarani, and in the second leg he scored the goal that secured the spot

Opener...Tigres concede as Lucas Alario puts River ahead in the second leg of the Final

River Plate are the first club to hold all three South American continental titles at the same time

Stopped...Tigres keeper Nahuel Guzman denies Tabare Viudez

in the Final. His clinical finish on the stroke of half-time opened up the game against Tigres in River's favour.

Defender Ramiro Funes Mori scored the third goal in the Final – and it was his brother, Rogelio Gabriel, who had been berated for missing goals when River were relegated. Ramiro not only scored vital goals for the club, he was also central to River's impressive defensive line.

The Libertadores Cup win underlined the transformation at River Plate over the past four years, but also brought to an end a two-decade wait for the trophy. Despite boasting more Argentinian league championships than any other club, Independiente (seven), Boca Juniors (six) and Estudiantes (four) all have more Libertadores titles than River, whose only other victories were in 1986 and 1996.

The 1996 Libertadores Cup-winning generation were, in part, the architects of this year's Libertadores success and River now look forward to the Club World Cup in Japan, where they fully expect to face Barcelona.

For that, the club, Gallardo and his players, will look to take inspiration from the generation of 1986, which not only won the Libertadores but were also world club champions. WS

Tim VICKERY

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Mind the gap

And so Tigres became the third Mexican club to reach the Final of the Libertadores Cup, only to be sent back to the northern hemisphere to think again. Perhaps the difference this time was that Tigres went into the decider as favourites – which looked well founded on the basis of the evidence presented in the semi-finals.

During the pause in the action for the Copa America, the Mexicans made a huge investment, bringing in wingers Jurgen Damm (Pachuca) and Javier Aquino (Villarreal), and former France centre-forward Andre Gignac (Marseille). But they initially looked to be at a disadvantage going into the game with Internacional for a place in the Final. Their opponents had been in constant action in the Brazilian championship, while Tigres had been on holiday, without a game since the end of May. Would they be in a good enough physical condition and could they bed in their new players in a hurry?

Ten minutes into the first leg in Porto Alegre, the answer seemed to be a resounding "no" as Internacional went two goals up. From that point on, though, Tigres took control, playing their way into the game and pulling a goal back through centre-back Hugo Ayala. But he was then sent off early in the second half, after which the visitors retreated and held on comfortably.

> These are worrying times for the game in South America

A week later, in Nuevo Leon, it was one-way traffic. Aquino and Damm were a 90-minute nightmare for the Internacional full-backs, Gignac was too hot to handle and Uruguayan midfielder Egidio Arevalo Rios kept popping up in the opposing penalty area as an element of surprise. A scoreline of 3-1 hardly did justice to Tigres' superiority. There was some late drama after Inter had pulled one back in the 88th minute – and another would have taken them through on away goals. But that did not happen and it would have been a colossal injustice.

River Plate, meanwhile, had to fight all the way against little Guarani in their semi-final.

Well led by Spanish coach Fernando Jubero, the Paraguayans were the surprise of the 2015 Libertadores. In the second leg in Asuncion they had halved River's 2-0 first-leg lead and an equaliser seemed likely. But then came the moment for River's re-enforcements to come good. Uruguayan attacking midfielder Tabare Viudez came off the bench to bring clarity to the counter attack and he produced a defence-splitting pass for centre-forward Lucas Alario to lob home the decisive goal. Rodrigo Mora had scored with a similarly delightful chip in the first leg in Buenos Aries, where Guarani were left ruing the absence through injury of defensive organiser Julio Cesar Caceres.

It was a tribute to the excellence of the pass from Vuidez in the return game that it managed to cut out Caceres. That goal from Alario was the only time that Guarani conceded in the knock-out stage while Caceres was on the field. The veteran marshalled his side's back three with quality and intelligence, reading the danger and snuffing it out quickly and efficiently. He had been superb as Guarani kept four consecutive clean sheets against the giants Corinthians of Brazil and Racing of Argentina, and had he been fit for the first leg of the semi-final his team might have pushed River even closer.

Carlos Sanchez, River Plate's dynamic Uruguayan midfielder, was seen by some as the outstanding player of the competition, but Caceres has as good a claim as anyone – which speaks volumes about contemporary South American club football.

Last year's star man was Juan Mercier of champions San Lorenzo – a solid, dependable central midfielder in his mid-30s who, from a position slightly higher up the pitch, brought to bear some of the virtues shown by Caceres in this campaign.

Approaching 36, Caceres is even older. He has had a fine career, appearing in three World Cups and playing for both Boca Juniors and River Plate. But his European experience is limited to a few games in France for Nantes and in Spain for Gimnastic. And if a world XI were being picked, he would hardly have merited a mention at his peak, let alone at his current age.

And yet, like the journeyman Mercier in the previous year, that fact that Caceres can shine brightly in the Libertadores is perhaps proof of the dearth of genuine quality in the competition.

A comparison between the Final of the Champions League and the Libertadores is tough viewing for fans of the latter.

The gap between top level European and South American football has never been wider – and with MLS on the rise in the US, and China and the Middle East also creaming off talent, these are worrying times for the club game in the continent that in the past has produced some of the world's greatest teams. WS

James Montague reports

SYRIA

In the shadow of civil war

One promising youngster gave up his Under-17 World Cup dream to flee death and destruction

It was a game they had to win, against an opponent they had to beat for more reasons than one. Syria's under-16 side stand to attention as their national anthem is played, prior to final group game in the AFC Championship in Bangkok, Thailand last year.

They had already overcome huge obstacles to be there. Since 2011 the country had sunk into a multi-layered and inexorably vicious civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people. More than seven million people have been internally displaced. A further four million have fled the country, with refugees living in camps in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, or risking everything with human traffickers on the journey to Europe.

The Syrian football league, meanwhile, has somehow continued, moving to the relatively safer surroundings of the capital Damascus which is still under government control. But the war has taken its toll. The mass bombing of cities like Homs and Aleppo has killed dozens of players, with several others joining the rebels in their fight against the forces of Syrian president Bashar Al Assad.

Several more have been jailed for allegedly supporting the rebels, while a number of former international players now play abroad, disgusted by the idea of playing for a team that represents the regime. One member of Syria's under-16 squad was even killed by a bomb in the southern city of Homs in the run-up to the tournament in Thailand. No one knows whether the government or the rebels were responsible.

Yet somehow, Syria's young footballers have thrived in recent years. They have qualified for several regional tournaments, reaching the quarter-finals of all but one in the under-16, -19 and -23 age groups since the war began. The under-23s even came within one match of qualifying for the 2012 Olympics.

And now they were in Thailand, about to play Iran in a match of huge significance.

A win would set the team on their way to the quarter-finals, and reaching the semi-final would secure a place at this autumn's Under-17 World Cup in Chile.

And their opponents in this game? None other than Iran – the country blamed by many within Syria of providing arms, money and material support to keep Assad in power.

Captaining Syria's under-16s is their playmaker, Mohammed Jaddou. "The Syrian national team is my country's team,

Experience...Syria line up before a World Cup qualifier against Afghanistan in June

Committed...Syria's Raja Rafe (left)

and it was an honour to play for such a team," recalls Jaddou of the tournament.

Within a few minutes of the anthems finishing and the game kicking off, Jaddou broke free on the right after a perfectly weighted ball over the top split the defence. He had time to choose his spot and he drilled the ball low into the bottom right hand corner to give Syria the lead. They would go on to win 2-1, before dispatching Uzbekistan 5-2, with Jaddou scoring one and setting up another.

The midfielder was suspended for the semi-final. In his absence Syria lost 7-1 to Korea, but it was enough for them to reach the finals in Chile. Jaddou smiles sadly when he thinks of Chile...because it's an achievement he will never get to savour.

"When we qualified for the world championship, I tried to resist and forget all the bad things that happened back in my country that affected me," he says.

"But I reached a point that I couldn't stand it any more."

Jaddou is sitting in the kitchen of his new home; a clean, bright but bare wooden-built house in a small village in southern Germany. He lives with five other Syrians, including his father and uncle, who also fled their homeland.

Despite his importance to the under-16 team, and the attraction of taking part in a tournament that in the past has earmarked the likes of Cesc Fabregas and Landon Donovon as stars for the future, Jaddou and his family embarked on a terrifying, two-month journey to escape Syria. First they went overland to Turkey, and then they travelled by boat to Italy, across the Mediterranean Sea – a journey that, according to the International Organization for Migration, has cost almost 2,000 lives this year. "I won't be able to forget it no matter how hard I try," Jaddou says of the voyage that nearly cost him his life. "We saw death with our own eyes."

Jaddou grew up in the coastal city of Latakia and by the age of eight his talent had been spotted by local club Hutteen, who play in the Syrian Premier League.

"I stopped giving my school much importance and only cared about playing football," he says of the brief few years he remembers playing football before the civil war began. "I loved football more than I loved my parents!"

But as the war began to engulf the

Fajr Ibrahim...coach of Syria's national side

country, it became harder and harder for him to travel from the coast to Damascus, through a patchwork of constantly shifting territory controlled by the government, the rebels and various groups aligned with the so-called Islamic State. His bus to training was attacked on several occasions.

"Shootings and battles between the government and the opposition were taking place and we got caught up in the crossfire," he says. "Missiles fell around our bus and they opened fire on us.

"The bus driver started driving as fast as possible so that he can leave the area and we also had to take cover under the chairs in the bus because otherwise snipers could take us out."

A team-mate, and Jaddou's best friend, 15-year-old Tarek Ghrair was killed during a mortar attack in Homs prior to the tournament in Thailand. Jaddou keeps a picture of his mangled body on his phone. "I cried for two days," he says. "He wasn't a friend. He was a brother."

In the fog of war, Jaddou had been viewed with suspicion by both sides. He claims to have been threatened by the rebels, who accuse anyone representing Syria of being complicit with the regime, and the government itself, but also says: "The government used to threaten to end my career and punish me if I didn't show up for a training camp. They also threatened to call me a deserter if I ever left the team."

The regime had form in this area, most noticeably in the case of Abdelbasset Saroot, the so-called "Singing Goalkeeper of Homs."

Saroot was the Syrian under-20 goalkeeper and played for Al Karama of Homs, then the most successful team in the Syrian league. They dominated the professional game domestically and even reached the Final of the Asian Champions League in 2006. Yet by 2011 Homs was seen as the capital of the revolution against President Assad, and Saroot had left the team and taken to the streets, using his phenomenal singing voice to recite religious and patriotic songs in front of small crowds that grew from a few hundred to tens of thousands.

Saroot soon became a target for the regime and he survived several assassination attempts – a story that has been told in the award winning documentary *Return to Homs*. He is believed to still be alive, a figurehead for the faltering uprising.

Another goalkeeper for played for both the national team and Al Karama is Mosab Balhous, who was jailed for "sheltering armed gangs and possessing suspicious amounts of money", according to news channel Al Arabiya.

Balhous was later released and, amazingly, allowed to rejoin the team. He even shook President Assad's hand when the team was invited to the presidential palace after Syria won the 2012 West Asian Championship, their first ever piece of silverware. Balhous is now team captain and played in Syria's 6-0 demolition of Afghanistan in their opening qualifier for the 2018 World Cup.

However, the pressure and the fear of playing football in Syria got too much for the teenage Jaddou.

Earlier this year he tried to fly to Germany, a country he had dreamed of playing in since he was a child, but he was barred from getting on the flight and told that the entire team that was due to play in the Under-17 World Cup Chile had been placed on a no-fly list. It was then that Jaddou's father sold his house, raising the $13,000 needed to pay people-smugglers to first cross overland into Turkey and then by boat across the Mediterranean to Italy.

The boat was overloaded. More than 130 men and women – young and old, healthy and the infirm alike – were crammed onto the 70-foot long vessel. Six hours after the boat had left the Turkish coast it began to sink.

"We had to throw everything away – food, clothes and belongings – to keep the boat afloat," says Jaddou, who recalls that the men and boys had to stay awake and bail water out of the boat with their bare hands.

"Not even for a second were we able to sleep. If we did we would eventually drown." By the time the Italian military

Success...fans (right) celebrate Syria's 6-0 World Cup win against Afghanistan (below)

> "The government used to threaten to end my career and punish me if I didn't show up for a training camp"
> **Mohammed Jaddou, Syria's under-16s captain**

spotted the boat – now with no electricity and no rudder – off the coast of Sicily, Jaddou had been at sea for five days and five sleepless nights.

"That was the third time in which I was so close to death but I survived."

On arriving in Italy, Jaddou travelled north through the country, with his father and uncle, avoiding the police until they reached Milan. They slept rough at the city's train station before spending the last of their money paying a trafficker to drive them to a refugee center in Munich. From there they were eventually housed in the hills outside the small town of Oberstaufen, near both the Austrian and Swiss border.

Today, Jaddou is training with Ravensburg, a team who play in Germany's fifth division. The club's under-19 side has excelled in recent years, and many players have made the step up to play for nearby Bundesliga members Freiburg.

Relaxed...next up for Syria in World Cup qualifying are top-of-the-table Singapore

"We decided to invite him without knowing what to expect," says Markus Wolfangel, coach of the club's under-19 team, as he watches Jaddou train. "We were very surprised from the performance of Mohammad."

Jaddou, for the moment at least, is safe. However, he fears being deported from Germany and has a hearing in a few months to find out whether he can stay. His biggest fear, though, is for his mother and two brothers who remain in Syria.

"I want to start as fast as possible so that I can take them away from that place filled with destruction, kidnapping, and insults and bring them here to Germany where it is safe," he says.

"It's probable that I hear of their death any minute now. My brothers are young, they could be kidnapped easily."

Jaddou's ambition, he says, is to play for a "top European club" in the Bundesliga or elsewhere. He dreams of one day playing against his hero Cristiano Ronaldo. Yet as far-fetched as that might seem at the moment, he still believes that scenario is more likely than him ever returning home.

"Syria is being completely razed to the ground," he says.

"Football in Syria is gone." WS

"If everybody is reasonably fit, I fully expect a great season... bring it on"

Facetoface

ARJEN ROBBEN

"A championship is something special. Winning titles is not a foregone conclusion"

At 31, Bayern Munich's Dutch international may seem more laid back, but he's lost none of his desire to win

Despite winning the title last season, Bayern were criticised in the final weeks after several defeats in the Bundesliga and semi-final eliminations in the Champions League and the German Cup. Do you think Bayern's achievements are not always appreciated enough?
When I hear the criticism I want to laugh, and that's the only reaction to have. People have to look at this realistically. It was a post-World Cup season and, at the beginning, everybody was predicting it was going to be particularly difficult. So what happened? We ended up as champions with a 10-point cushion – an outstanding performance.

But some of those defeats must have dampened the mood...
Towards the end we neglected the Bundesliga because we had a lot of injuries and wanted to concentrate on the Champions League and German Cup. In semi-finals, the small details tend to be decisive. That's the way it goes. What went right for us, for example, in the 2013 Champions League Final, went against us this time around. There's no reason for us to be ashamed of our season. For me, there's no happy medium when assessments are made. If you win, everything is wonderful; if you lose, it's all bad. It shouldn't be like this. After such a season, the coach and the players ought not to be called into question. We're not uncritical of ourselves. We always know when we haven't played well.

At times you were very critical in the wake of a poor display...
You have to talk about matters which aren't going to plan. There's no use lying.

So, do you think Bayern will be back on track for this campaign?
Absolutely. I've every confidence in the squad we have. All that matters is that we have a complete group for pre-season training. If everybody is reasonably fit, I fully expect a great season. Just look at our team. We'll have Javi Martinez raring to go again, Thiago should have a full summer of preparation, Franck Ribery and I will be back, and David Alaba will be healthy once more. Bring them all on. We'll take some stopping.

Do you see any need to make extensive changes to the team, after all it is an ageing squad?
We've enough at the club, and a super coach who knows what he's doing. We heard the same thing at the end of the 2011-12 season [when Bayern didn't win a trophy]. Everyone was saying a clean break and a new generation of players was required. And then we go and complete the triple. It's only worth bringing in new faces if they have great quality and can move us forward. There is no point in making signings just to please certain people. As for the age question, I can only speak for myself. I'm still fit and think I can play at this level for another couple of years.

Prior to missing the latter part of last term through injury, you'd been in unbelievable form, scoring 17 goals in 21 Bundesliga games and making a further eight. Was last season the best of your career?
I think that in the last two or three years I've continued to improve. Last season too, I made strides and again upped the ante. Following on from a fantastic World Cup, everything was going brilliantly. Physically, I was in great shape and I was playing well. Then came the injuries and the frustration. It all changed from one moment to the next. Naturally, I've wondered what might have been if I'd stayed fit.

After recovering from a stomach injury, you were back the following month for the German Cup semi-final against Borussia Dortmund, but only lasted for a few minutes after coming on as a substitute...
Some did speculate that I'd returned to action too soon. That's complete nonsense. Those two injuries had nothing to do with one another. Before the Dortmund tie, I'd been training extremely well. In the past, I've had a good instinct for potential injury problems, but on this occasion I didn't suspect a thing.

How are you now?
At the end of the season I stayed on for an extra week on the training ground. It felt good. I got in some good work with the fitness coaches and, importantly, began to run again.

With you in the side, would Bayern have enjoyed more success in last season's cup competitions?
Such second-guessing makes no sense. I would have loved to have been fully involved in those matches with Porto, Dortmund and Barcelona. But talking ifs and maybes doesn't help anyone.

Were you disappointed to miss out on the Bundesliga's top goalscorer award by just two goals?
Of course it would have been nice to pick up this trophy, but no more than that. At best, it's just a nice bonus. Much more important is for the team to win games and cups.

You looked particularly happy when Bayern paraded the Bundesliga shield at the end of the season...
And why not? A championship is something special. Winning titles is not a foregone conclusion. You work all year and at the end, you're on top. You enjoy it for all it's worth. Nobody can take it away from you.

What is your working relationship like with Bayern boss Pep Guardiola?
He's a coach who encourages us to push on, to continually improve.

Interview by Mounir Zitouni/ESM

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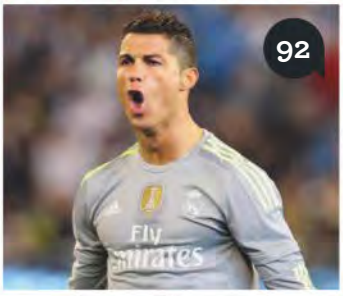
SEASON PREVIEW

2015-16

70 page special feature



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Salzburg to place their trust in youth

Having regularly failed to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League despite their sponsor's annual hefty investment, Red Bull Salzburg appear to have abandoned their dream of buying success. From now on, they look set to concentrate on developing their own young talent before selling players on and making a profit.

And it was this shift in emphasis that prompted Adi Hutter to walk out on the club shortly after he had led them to last season's domestic league-and-cup double, claiming that he does not see himself as a "youth academy" coach.

Hutter left after only one season in charge and was clearly unhappy with the change of priority, explaining: "Salzburg are going in the direction of becoming a training club. More and more good players are leaving and young talent is coming in.

"For me, it's always difficult to start the season in the middle of upheaval.

"Too many good players have left the club in a short space of time."

Over the course of the last 12 months, Hutter saw almost his entire first team walk out the door at the Red Bull Arena. Sadio Mane went to Southampton, Kevin Kampl was sold to Borussia Dortmund and Andre Ramalho joined Bayer Leverkusen, while Stefan Ilsanker, Peter Gulacsi and Nils Quaschner all moved on to Salzburg's sister club RB Leipzig, who play in the

New breed... Salzburg's 18-year-old winger Konrad Laimer (in white)

KEY DATES
Season started on July 25 and will finish on May 14.

Key early games include Red Bull Salzburg v Austria Vienna *(Aug 23)*, Rapid Vienna v Red Bull Salzburg *(Sep 2)* and Rapid Vienna v Austria Vienna *(Oct 23)*.

TALKING POINTS

- Rapid Vienna (left) are Austria's most successful club, but they won the last of their 32 titles in 2008. Having kept the basis of the side that finished second last season, will this be their year domestically?
- With four of this season's 10 teams – Mattersburg, Grodig, Ried and Rheindorf Altach – coming from towns with populations under 12,000, is the Austrian Bundesliga becoming a league of village teams?
- Can Austria Salzburg return to the top flight? Formed by disgruntled fans when Red Bull bought their club, the reformed Austria Salzburg will be playing in the second tier Erste Liga this season, having started out in the seventh tier in 2006.

German second tier.

Ralf Rangnick, who was Red Bulls' sporting director for both Salzburg and Leipzig, has also severed his ties with the Austrian outfit. After three seasons working with Salzburg, and turning them into exponents of a high-tempo pressing game, he will now work solely as coach of ambitious Leipzig as they attempt to reach the German top flight.

Following the loss of Hutter and Rangnick, Salzburg have turned to Peter Zeidler – who was previously coach of second-tier Liefering, who are a de facto subsidiary of Salzburg – to implement their new policy.

"Peter Zeidler knows our philosophy inside and out after several successful years with FC Liefering," says Christoph Freund, the club's new sporting director. "He is a coach whose work we know well and whose quality we are confident in."

When Red Bull took over Austria Salzburg in 2005 their publicly stated plan was for the team to become Champions League group stage regulars, rather like Basle have managed to do in neighbouring Switzerland. But while Salzburg have certainly achieved domestic dominance, winning the league six times in 10 seasons during that period, European success has constantly evaded them, failing for seven seasons in a row before this campaign to get past the qualifying rounds. And all that in spite of a budget which is far superior to their rivals.

> "Too many good players have left the club in a short space of time"
>
> **Ex-Salzburg coach Adi Hutter (below)**

With the situation at Salzburg starting to look uncertain, it remains to be seen whether Rapid Vienna and their city neighbours Austria Vienna can take advantage and challenge for the title.

Rapid have made few changes to the squad which finished second last year, while Austria – having been turned down by Felix Magath during the summer – hired former Basle and Hamburg coach Thorsten Fink in an attempt to improve on last season's dismal seventh place.

Austria Vienna may not, however, be the best place for Fink to try to revive his career. Last season he spent four months in Cyprus with APOEL, prior to which he had a topsy-turvy two years at Hamburg – which included a club record-equalling 9-2 defeat to Bayern Munich.

Known as the "*Trainerfriedhof*" – the coach's graveyard – Austria Vienna have employed 38 of them in the last 30 years. Of those, only Karl Daxbacher and Herbert Prohaska managed to complete two full seasons in charge.

Even Germany's World Cup-winning boss Joachim Low was among those whose reign came to a premature end.

Brian Homewood

Revival...Thorsten Fink has taken over as coach of Austria Vienna

AUSTRIAN BUNDESLIGA 2015-16

1 Admira Wacker *(Modling)*
2 Austria Vienna
Rapid Vienna
3 Grodig
4 Mattersburg
5 Red Bull Salzburg
6 Rheindorf Altach
7 Ried
8 Sturm Graz
9 Wolfsberger

ONES TO WATCH

JONATHAN SORIANO *(Red Bull Salzburg)*
The Spanish striker has scored 88 goals in 93 games in the last three seasons and got a hat-trick in his first game this term.

NABY KEITA *(Red Bull Salzburg)*
The 20-year-old Guinean midfielder had an excellent first season in Austria after being signed from French Ligue 2 side Istres.

MARTIN HINTEREGGER *(Red Bull Salzburg)*
Still only 22, the commanding left-footed centre-back has already played in Salzburg's first team for five seasons.

ROBERT BERIC *(Rapid Vienna)*
The Slovene was the league's second-top scorer last term, behind Soriano, with 27 goals following his summer arrival from Sturm Graz.

PAULO MIRANDA *(Red Bull Salzburg)*
Despite attempts to produce their own players from now on, Salzburg were still able to pay Sao Paulo €2.7million for the Brazilian defender.

Title up for grabs in wide-open contest

Take one feeder league, add a mixture of relatively low wages and club budgets, throw in a pinch of an ill-designed play-off system and you have a recipe for one of the most open leagues in Europe. It could only be Belgium.

It's on the cards that none of the Belgium squad at the 2016 Euros will be playing in the Pro League as each season some of the best-known players leave. This summer has been no different, with Aleksandar Mitrovic and Maty Ryan having gone to Newcastle United and Valencia respectively, and the league not having the ability to attract big-name replacements.

In the coming campaign, any one of five teams – Anderlecht, Club Brugge, Gent, Genk or Standard Liege – could get their hands on the trophy come May.

Disciplinarian...new Standard boss Slavoljub Muslin

While Anderlecht usually start as favourites, their failure to qualify for the Champions League has made it hard for them to bring in the required talent. A lot will be expected from 18-year-old Youri Tielemans, 21-year-old Dennis Praet and Steven Defour in midfield. But while there is plenty of "star quality" they lack someone able to do the hard graft.

Club Brugge played more games than any other club in Europe last time out. General manager Vincent Mannaert does not want a repeat this term and he has been forceful in saying that the title is the priority for Michel Preud'homme's side.

After losing Australian keeper Ryan, they have brought in two replacements – Sinan Bolat (Porto, on loan) and Sebastien Bruzzese (Zulte Waregem) but they face a struggle to win the title for the first time in 11 years.

Danger...Laurent Depoitre (left) and his Gent team-mates must beware "second-season syndrome"

Like Anderlecht, Club Brugge look weak in certain areas and if they don't spend they could miss out again.

Gent were last year's big surprise, with coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck's tactically astute game plan taking a team without any stars to an improbable league title. But despite their Champions League windfall, Gent have not invested to refresh their squad and it's likely they will suffer from "second-season syndrome".

With Roland Duchatelet having walked

BELGIAN PRO LEAGUE 2015-16

1 Anderlecht *(Brussels)*
2 Charleroi
3 Club Brugge
4 Genk
5 Gent
6 Kortrijk
7 Leuven
8 Lokeren
9 Mechelen
10 Mouscron-Peruwelz
11 Oostende
12 Sint-Truiden
13 Standard Liege
14 Waasland-Beveren
15 Westerlo
16 Zulte Waregem

KEY DATES
Season started on July 24 and will finish in May.

Key early games include Club Brugge v Standard (Aug 28) and Anderlecht v Genk (Sep 10).

ONES TO WATCH

YOURI TIELEMANS *(Anderlecht)*
It's time for the 18-year-old to make his mark. Still to find his best position, he needs to impose his personality and undoubted talent.

NEESKENS KEBANO *(Charleroi)*
The midfielder was the main man as Charleroi reached the play-offs last season. The only question is how long will he stay?

JEAN-LUC DOMPE *(Sint-Truiden)*
The France under-20 striker turned down Standard when leaving Valenciennes and has match-changing ability.

JOHN BOSTOCK *(Leuven)*
The former England under-17 captain – who is now 23 – scored and made goals for Leuven in the second tier last season.

Carrying the weight... Dennis Praet (above left) will need to play a key role if Anderlecht are to regain the title

away from Standard roughly €12million richer, the Liege club are new under the ownership of businessman/fan Bruno Venanzi.

Hugely ambitious, and with the club's supporters right behind him, Venanzi has high hopes for his club this season. There is also a new coach in Slavoljub Muslin, who has a reputation for being a strict disciplinarian, while only Morocco midfielder Mehdi Carcela-Gonzalez (Benfica) has left so far, with winger Anthony Knockaert arriving on a free transfer from Leicester City.

Since winning the title in 2011, Genk have been on a downward spiral. Alex McLeish couldn't stop the rot and they have now turned to the highly regarded Peter Maes, who worked wonders for several years at Lokeren. The troublemakers in the squad have been removed and the team looks to have a good blend of youth and experience.

It's likely that the teams featuring in the play-offs will be these five, together with one from a trio consisting of a rejuvenated Mechelen, a resurgent Charleroi and an ambitious Oostende.

The closeness of the title race will be heightened by the continuing policy to halve the points gained by the top six clubs in the classic season ahead of the play-offs. With no clear favourite, it could be the closest title race for years.

John Chapman

TALKING POINTS

- Lokeren midfielder Hans Vanaken has been the league's "next big thing" for several seasons and his move to Club Brugge could be just what he – and they – need.
- While all eyes will initially be on Imoh Ezekiel, who is on loan from Qatari club Al Arabi, the man who could replace Aleksandar Mitrovic as Anderlecht's centre-forward is teenager Aaron Leya Iseka, who is the younger brother of Marseille's Michy Batshuayi.

Big hope...Leya Iseka

- Hein Vanhaezebrouck's Gent were a breath of fresh air last term, but can he keep the team near the top of the table again?
- Lokeren president Roger Lambrecht is not known for his patience. If early results are not positive, will coach Bob Peeters be on his way?
- Will the return of Jonathan Legear – a man who once destroyed a service station by driving straight through it – to his hometown club Standard be the re-making of him?

Former great CKSA in amateur ranks

Champions of Bulgaria for a record 31 times and European Cup semi-finalists twice, CSKA Sofia will play in the third-tier V Group this season, where they will be joined by Lokomotiv Sofia, who themselves have been league winners four times.

To understand CSKA's fall from grace you have to go back to 2006, when Alexander Tomov became president of the club. The former politician had big plans for the future and attracted sponsorship from Indian millionaire Pramod Mittal, who owned Kremikovtsi, Bulgaria's largest metalworking company.

In 2008, CSKA won the domestic league title for what was to be the last time, but they were barred from the Champions League due to their financial situation. Amid protests from supporters, Tomov was forced to step down and the club passed into the hands of Dimitar Borisov and Ivo Ivanov, who were known as "The Titans" because they owned the waste firm Titan AS.

Despite somehow managing to get their licence to play in European competition, CSKA's finances went from bad to worse, and in 2013 Borisov and Ivanov left as the debt soared ever higher.

With the club facing bankruptcy, a group of businessmen and former club playing legends stepped in to save the day – remarkably, under the leadership of former president Tomov, who was still widely blamed for the origins of the crisis in 2008.

With demotion to the second tier a real possibility, finding a coach willing to take charge of CSKA proved extremely difficult, but somehow Stoycho Mladenov managed to inspire the team and they rose to the challenge, finishing the first half of last season in first place. Then, after three straight defeats in the spring, Mladenov walked away.

Critics would later point to his salary of €20,000 a month plus bonuses – huge by Bulgarian standards – only adding to the club's problems. And with his youngest son as his co-coach, an older son working as a football agent, and his wife also on the payroll, many felt Mladenov treated the club more like a family business.

Whatever the truth, CSKA went into freefall following Mladenov's departure, setting an unwanted record of 12 consecutive games without a win and 960 minutes without a goal. Three coaches came and went as they ended the season in fifth place.

But the humiliation didn't end there. With debts said to total €15m, UEFA finally stepped in and withdrew the club's European and Bulgarian professional football licence.

Barred from the top two divisions, the now amateur CSKA had two options available: play in the fourth division debt-free, or play in the third tier with all those debts still outstanding.

Past glory...CSKA celebrate winning the Bulgarian Cup in 2011

Grisha Ganchev, owner of Litex Lovech, agreed to take over the club with another businessman, Yulian Indzhov, and CSKA will compete in this season's South-West V Group. The new sport director is former national coach Plamen Markov, while former player Hristo Yanev is the coach. Although the team is comprised mostly of youngsters, experience is provided by Boris Galchev and Alexander Branekov. However, what will happen about the money still owed remains to be seen.

Lokomotiv Sofia, who finished third last term were also demoted due to financial

BULGARIAN A GROUP 2015-16

1 Beroe *(Stara Zagora)*
2 Botev *(Plovdiv)*
Lokomotiv
3 Cherno More *(Varna)*
4 Levski *(Sofia)*
Slavia
5 Litex *(Lovech)*
6 Ludogorets (*Razgrad*)
7 Montana
8 Pirin (*Blagoevgrad*)

KEY DATES
Season started on July 17 and will finish on May 28, 2016.

Key early games include
Slavia Sofia v Levski Sofia (Sep 11) and Ludogorets v Litex Lovech (Sep 25).

Crisis...CSKA owner Alexander Tomov is protected by police from angry fans

TALKING POINTS

Exit...Bezjak has joined Rijeka

- Will defending champions Ludogorets struggle after selling Junior Caicara (Schalke), Alexandre Barthe (Grasshoppers), Roman Bezjak (Rijeka) and looking set to lose Dani Abalo to Real Betis?
- Portuguese coach Bruno Ribeiro may be a friend of Jose Mourinho, but he could be on borrowed time with Ludogorets.
- Could French midfielder Oumar Diaby be the final piece in the jigsaw for Levski Sofia after joining from Slovakian side Kosice?
- Krassimir Balakov stepped down as coach of Litex Lovech after they were knocked out of the Europa League by Jelgava of Latvia on away goals. His replacement, Ljupko Petrovic, then quit for "family reasons" after just three weeks in charge.

problems, although their debt only amounted to around €600,000.

Nikolay Gigov, club president for 21 years, ran a successful weapons business, so it was strange that he chose not to pay what was a relatively small sum. It has been suggested that maybe he had grown tired of football.

Unlike CSKA, Lokomotiv have been left to the mercy of fate. All their players have gone, sporting director Georgi Markov has moved to Botev Plovdiv and there is no coach. New owners Kiril Loskov and Petar Kasev paid just €100 for this once great club and nobody knows just what the future holds in store.

Rumen Paytashev

ONES TO WATCH

DANILO ASPRILLA *(Litex)*
The Colombian winger was on target twice on his Litex debut in February last year and has maintained a decent scoring record since.

BJORN JOHNSEN *(Litex)*
His side exited the Europa League in the qualifying stage, but he scored two impressive goals against Latvian side Jelgava.

SPAS DELEV *(Beroe)*
Signed from Lokomotiv Plovdiv, he scored four goals in the two Europa League ties against Atlantas of Lithuania, including a hat-trick.

GEORGI KOSTADINOV *(Levski)*
The 24-year-old midfielder, signed from Beroe, scored on his debut for Levski in a 1-1 draw at Botev Plovdiv.

Champions turn to Thorup after coach walks out

The celebrations of last season's champions, first-time winners Midtjylland, had barely died down before coach Glen Riddersholm announced his resignation, citing "difficult considerations".

"I've been honest to myself and have admitted there are everyday compromises that I can no longer accept if I want to remain the best version of myself and the leader I want to be for the players and staff," said the 43-year-old by way of cryptic explanation.

Riddersholm was full of praise for the club that had won success with the appliance of science, with its "Moneyball" approach under British owner Matthew Benham – so why did he go?

The most cogent argument is that he

Import...Copenhagen's Verbic

fell out with his immediate boss, sporting director Claus Steinlein, perhaps over transfer policy. Both were at Midtjylland before the new era began and maybe there was an element of an old-fashioned power struggle.

Just three weeks before the 2015-16 season kicked off, the defending champions turned to the hottest property around at the moment: Jess Thorup, who guided Denmark to a surprise semi-final spot in this summer's Euro Under-21 Championship, thereby qualifying for a place in next year's Olympic football tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

Thorup's stock could not have been higher at the Danish Football Association and he would have been a very strong candidate to become coach of the senior side when Morten Olsen retires next summer. Instead, he has been tempted by the lure of leading a club side against the best in Europe.

Before the under-21 post, Thorup had been in charge of Superliga side Esbjerg, where he had integrated a new generation of youngsters into the team with impressive results. A similar approach will be required at Midtjylland who do not have the financial resources of last season's runners-up, Copenhagen.

"I was immediately interested when they contacted me," said Thorup. "I like their new way of thinking about football. It will

DANISH SUPERLIGA 2015-16

1 AaB *(Aalborg)*
2 AGF *(Aarhus)*
3 Brondby
4 Copenhagen
5 Esbjerg
6 Hobro
7 Midtjylland *(Herning)*
8 Nordsjaelland *(Farum)*
9 OB *(Odense)*
10 Randers
11 SonderjyskE *(Haderslev)*
12 Viborg

ONES TO WATCH

KEY DATES
Season started July 17 and finishes May 29, 2016.

Key early games include Midtjylland v Copenhagen (Aug 14) and Brondby v Copenhagen (Nov 8).

NICOLAI JORGENSEN *(Copenhagen)*
The pacy 24-year-old is currently the best Danish striker in the Superliga following a spell in Germany with Bayer Leverskusen.

DANIEL AGGER *(Brondby)*
Rarely does the current national team captain play for a club at home, but the former Liverpool star is the rock in defence for Brondby.

MUSTAFA AMINI *(Randers)*
Australian-born midfielder, with an Afghan father and Nicaraguan mother, who arrived from Borussia Dortmund in the summer.

YOUSSEF TOUTOUH *(Copenhagen)*
Attacking midfielder who has impressed for the Danish under-21 side and could be set for a breakthrough season.

TEEMU PUKKI *(Brondby)*
Much-travelled Finland striker who scored nine goals for Brondby last season and has turned a loan from Celtic into a permanent transfer.

Clear...Copenhagen defender Mathias Jorgensen repels a Midtjylland attack

Leading light... Denmark under-21 coach Jess Thorup has taken over at Midtjylland

> "I've been honest to myself and have admitted there are everyday compromises that I can no longer accept"
>
> **Glen Riddersholm, who quit as coach of champions Midtjylland**

be a challenge, but I feel it is a good step in my career."

Midtjylland have been relatively inactive in the transfer market, selling goalkeeper Jakob Haugaard to Stoke City of the Premier League, while acquiring Austrian winger Daniel Royer from Austria Vienna and defender Kian Hansen from Nantes.

The biggest moves in the market were made by Copenhagen, who are smarting from two successive seasons without the title and are desperate to avoid a third.

In his second spell at the club, coach Stale Solbakken is hugely experienced in the Danish game and all his signings look sound investments, particularly the two Denmark internationals: defender Peter Ankersen, on loan from Austria's Red Bull Salzburg, and midfielder Kasper Kusk from Twente in Holland.

Serbian midfielder Benjamin Verbic from Slovenian club Celje looks like he could be a shrewd buy and there is added firepower in attack with the addition of Paraguayan international Federico Santander from Guarani.

Copenhagen finished last season strongly, winning the Danish Cup, and they are the bookmaker's favourites following the midsummer turmoil at Midtjylland. It is a must-win season for Solbakken, who knows he will not survive if his side fail to reclaim the Superliga title.

Jim Holden

TALKING POINTS

- Will Federico Santander adapt quickly enough to make an impact for Copenhagen? South American players traditionally take time to settle in Danish football and the striker arrived virtually straight from the Copa America with little time to recuperate.
- It has been 10 years since Brondby won the league, and seven since they lifted the cup. However, there was a marked improvement last season and their squad looks as strong as it has for a long time. Can they finally ended the trophy drought?
- Pione Sisto, Midtjylland's 20-year-old refugee from Uganda, revealed his potential at the Euro Under-21s with Denmark this summer. Can the champions keep him on board as new boss Jess Thorup beds in?
- Who will replace national coach Morten Olsen when he steps down next summer? Thorup is certainly a candidate, while OB's Kent Nielsen, who played in the famous Euro 92 triumph, could also be a contender with a good season at his new club.
- AGF from Aarhus are back in the top flight this term but there will be a famous name missing as their 24-year-old winger Andreas Laudrup – the son of Danish legend Michael – has had to retire due to arthritis.

Nearing the end... national team coach Morten Olsen will step down next summer

Chelsea lead from the front

For the first time in more than a decade, none of England's top six sides changed their manager in the close season. Will that familiarity breed contempt? Or will the stability provide the platform for an exciting, open league campaign?

Certainly, it is hard to see anybody challenging the dominance of the big four of Chelsea, Arsenal and the two Manchester clubs, City and United. Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur, the teams that have come closest to breaking into the Champions League places in recent seasons, still look short of a serious challenge.

Chelsea, as defending champions, started as favourites even though they kicked off the campaign with few new additions. Colombian forward Radamel Falcao and goalkeeper Asmir Begovic were the only new arrivals, with Petr Cech controversially sold to Arsenal and Brazilian defender Filipe Luis returning to Atletico Madrid.

Manager Jose Mourinho is in a minority in believing he can get the best from Falcao, who struggled to recover his best form at Manchester United last term. The Colombian was rushed back from a serious knee injury last year in order to play for his country at the World Cup.

Opinion was more divided over the departure of 33-year-old Cech. Chelsea got good money (£10million) for a player who was unhappy at being a reserve to Thibaut Courtois but, at £8m from Stoke City, Begovic would appear to be a more-than-adequate replacement and one who is happy to play a limited role.

Chelsea were still in the market for other players, notably Augsburg's highly rated Ghanaian left-back Baba Rahman and Everton defender John Stones. But few of Chelsea's army of young loanees – almost 30, according to the club website – will get an opportunity this season. The club have been stockpiling talent from across the globe – Brazilian forward Kenedy (Fluminense) and Romanian defender Cristian Manea (Viitorul) were the latest to be signed and sent out on loan this summer – but very few have made the first-team squad.

> "You don't need to buy 10 players to be a better team"
> **Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho**

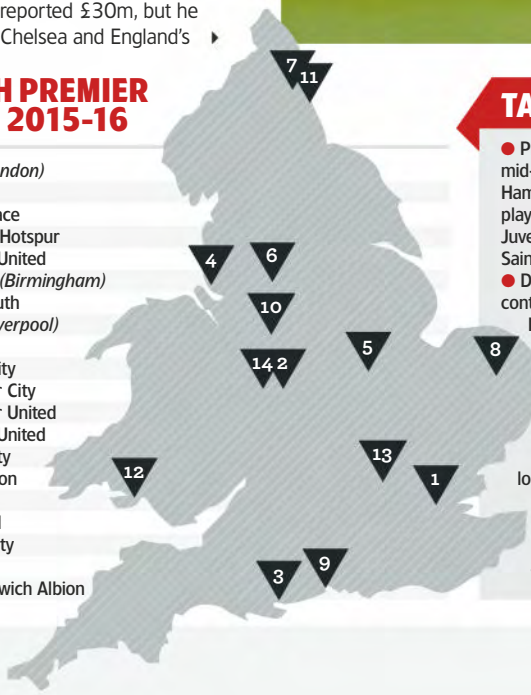
Instead, Mourinho will stick with the tried and tested group of players who won the title at a canter last season. The major caveat is that he needs striker Diego Costa to retain his fitness.

"You don't need to buy 10 players to be a better team," Mourinho said. "Chelsea likes very much to be where Chelsea is." The manager re-affirmed his commitment to the club by agreeing a new four-year deal worth a reported £30m, but he also claimed Chelsea and England's ▸

Another chance...Radamel Falcao is at Chelsea

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE 2015-16

1 Arsenal *(London)*
Chelsea
Crystal Palace
Tottenham Hotspur
West Ham United
2 Aston Villa *(Birmingham)*
3 Bournemouth
4 Everton *(Liverpool)*
Liverpool
5 Leicester City
6 Manchester City
Manchester United
7 Newcastle United
8 Norwich City
9 Southampton
10 Stoke City
11 Sunderland
12 Swansea City
13 Watford
14 West Bromwich Albion



TALKING POINTS

- Premier League TV money means mid-ranking clubs such as Stoke, West Ham and Palace have been able to sign players from Barcelona (Ibrahim Afellay), Juventus (Angelo Ogbonna) and Paris Saint-Germain (Yohan Cabaye).
- Despite the TV riches, away fans continue to be exploited by clubs – Norwich charged Crystal Palace fans £45 for the opening game of the season. Expect support for the Football Supporters Federation's "Twenty's Plenty" campaign to grow throughout the season.
- Chelsea have 29 young players on loan at other clubs; few have made it to Chelsea's first-team squad. Patrick Bamford, a success last season at Middlesbrough, has been sent out again, this time to Crystal Palace.

PROMOTED TEAMS

BOURNEMOUTH
A first top-flight adventure for the south-coast club backed by secretive Russian owner Maxim Denim and guided by progressive young coach Eddie Howe.

WATFORD
Owned by Gino Pozzo, who also controls Italian club Udinese and Granada of Spain. Hoping for better than their last top-flight campaign in 2006-07, when they finished bottom.

NORWICH CITY
Back after one season away, courtesy of a play-off win over Middlesbrough and now under young Scottish manager Alex Neil.

Staying...Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho (left) has signed a new four-year deal

Retiring...Louis Van Gaal (second left) will call it a day in 2017

Import...Angelo Ogbonna

- Top-flight debutants Bournemouth scored 98 goals en route to the Championship title last season. The signings of Max Gradel (Saint-Etienne) and Christian Atsu (season loan from Chelsea) will further boost their reputation for free-flowing football.
- Watford have 20 different nationalities in their squad as their controversial owner Gino Pozzo moves players around his network of clubs. Quique Sanchez Flores, the club's fifth manager in 12 months, has the unenviable task of moulding a team together.
- Liverpool have traditionally stayed loyal to struggling managers. But how much slack will the club cut Brendan Rodgers if expensive signings Roberto Firmino and Christian Benteke fail to fire Liverpool in to the top four?
- Clubs again spent heavily in the summer transfer market, with more than £500million laid out by the start of August as they act to avoid missing out on next year's bumper TV deal, worth £5.1billion over three years.
- Stoke's re-invention under Mark Hughes continues. Ibrahim Afellay is the latest recruit from Barcelona as the Tony Pulis years become a fading memory.
- After defying expectations last season, Southampton have again lost players to bigger clubs: Morgan Schneiderlin to Man United and Nathaniel Clyne, another sale to Liverpool. Jordie Clasie is an astute signing but how will the Saints cope with life in the Europa League and the Thursday/Sunday match congestion?
- West Ham parted company with Sam Allardyce and hired Slaven Bilic. But every team Allardyce has left (Bolton, Newcastle, Blackburn) have since suffered relegation. In their last season at Upton Park before the controversial switch to the Olympic Stadium, can West Ham buck the trend?

Barca recruit...Stoke City's Ibrahim Afellay

other leading clubs cannot compete for players with Barcelona, Real Madrid and Bayern Munich. "I think there are only three clubs in the world who have the power to say, 'I don't sell'," he claimed.

"This is Real Madrid, Barcelona and Bayern Munich. Is anyone in England interested in Thomas Muller? For sure. Can we, England, bring Thomas Muller from Bayern? I don't think so.

"Does anyone want Messi? Can you bring him? I don't think so. They are big clubs with big histories, economically strong and stable, income amazing. I think they sell when they want to sell. When you see a player leave one of these big clubs you have to think it's because they want him to go."

Mourinho's words could well have been aimed at Manchester United, who brought in such a "name" in Bastian Schweinsteiger from Bayern Munich, but wrote off Angel Di Maria just one year after his arrival as a record signing from Real Madrid. The £43m paid by Paris Saint-Germain represented a £15m loss for United, but manager Louis Van Gaal accepted the departure of an unhappy player who struggled with the physical nature of the English game and whose form appeared to drop following a violent burglary at his family home in February.

United were the busiest of the top four in the summer transfer market. In addition to Schweinsteiger, they signed French midfielder Morgan Schneiderlin, Dutch forward Memphis Depay and Italian full-back Matteo Darmian – an outlay of some £70m. Robin Van Persie, somewhat surprisingly, joined Turkey's Fenerbahce, leaving Wayne Rooney as the undisputed first-choice centre-forward. Rooney's partnership with the livewire Depay will be crucial to United's progress this season. Schneiderlin will add steel to the midfield while Schweinsteiger, injuries permitting, will bring greater guile in high-profile games. Van Gaal insists he will retire in 2017 when his contract expires. Whether he has done enough to challenge Chelsea (and City) remains to be seen.

Across town, City boss Manuel Pellegrini agreed a one-year contract extension, until 2017, as rumours persisted that the club has targetted Pep Guardiola as his replacement next summer.

City backed their coach with the record £47m signing of Raheem Sterling from Liverpool. Sterling gives City an exciting new attacking outlet. If Sergio Aguero stays fit, City will provide Chelsea with their biggest challenge – especially now that midfielder Yaya Toure, a disappointment last season, has enjoyed a summer break after his involvement in the 2014 World Cup and 2015 African Nations Cup.

Arsenal's main summer signing could

New pairing...Manchester United's Memphis Depay (left) and Wayne Rooney

Think tank...the United bench

Extension...City boss Manuel Pellegrini

ONES TO WATCH

RAHEEM STERLING
(Manchester City)
His departure from Liverpool was acrimonious but City's record £47m buy will form a fearsome attack with Sergio Aguero and David Silva.

CHRISTIAN BENTEKE
(Liverpool)
Anfield's expensive new centre-forward cost £32.5m from Aston Villa, where he proved himself to be a prolific goalscorer when fit.

MORGAN SCHNEIDERLIN
(Manchester United)
An astute signing from Southampton for United's midfield, where his defensive qualities will allow others to flourish.

ANDRE AYEW
(Swansea City)
The Ghana forward arrived on a free transfer from Marseille as the Welsh club look to prove that there is life after Wilfried Bony.

DIMITRI PAYET
(West Ham)
The top assist provider in the French league for Marseille last season, his capture was a sign of intent from the London club.

Pressure...Brendan Rodgers needs a good start

a hairline fracture.

Outside of the big four, Brendan Rodgers will come under pressure if his expensive new signings Christian Benteke and Roberto Firmino fail to click. Even if they do, it may not be enough to break into the top four. Similarly, Tottenham, fifth last season, have not refreshed their squad in any way to suggest that things will be any different this season.

Liverpool and Spurs may be challenged by Swansea City, Stoke and Southampton who all bought well in the summer. West Ham, Newcastle and Crystal Palace also did well in the transfer market.

Not only is TV money greater in England than elsewhere, the fruits of TV deals are spread more evenly. Hence the arrival from Europe's leading clubs of players of the calibre of Georginio Wijnaldum (PSV to Newcastle), Ibrahim Afellay (Barcelona to Stoke), Andre Ayew (Marseille to Swansea), Dmitri Payet (Marseille to West Ham) and Yohan Cabaye (Paris Saint-Germain to Crystal Palace).

Europe's loss may be England's gain

Gavin Hamilton

prove just as influential as Sterling, albeit for completely different reasons. While Cech may have been deemed surplus to requirements at Chelsea, his move across town has given Arsenal their most commanding keeper since Jens Lehmann. Under Arsene Wenger, who celebrates his 20th anniversary at the club this autumn, there has never been much doubt over Arsenal's attacking capabilities. The concerns have always been further back.

However, while Cech represented a positive development for Arsenal, the club were hit by the news that Jack Wilshere will be sidelined for up to two months with

Big signing...Christian Benteke (right)

NEW COACHES

CLAUDIO RANIERI
(Leicester City)
The "Tinkerman" returns to England, after 11 years away, as a surprise replacement for Nigel Pearson.

QUIQUE FLORES
(Watford)
Former Valencia, Benfica and Atletico Madrid boss who must mould promoted Watford's multi-national signings into a team.

SLAVEN BILIC
(West Ham)
The former Croatia boss returns to Upton Park with a mission to spice up West Ham's play ahead of next year's move to the Olympic stadium.

STEVE McCLAREN
(Newcastle United)
The former England manager returns to the English top flight, hoping to bring the good times back to St James' Park.

PETR CECH
(Arsenal)
Surprisingly allowed to leave Chelsea for their London rivals – seemingly against his manager's wishes – after losing his place to Thibaut Courtois.

GEORGINIO WIJNALDUM
(Newcastle United)
Another addition to Newcastle's Dutch contingent – and at £14.7m proof that owner Mike Ashley has recognised the need to invest more in the squad.

ROBERTO FIRMINO
(Liverpool)
A revelation in Germany with Hoffenheim, but the Brazilian is an expensive gamble for Liverpool at £22m, which could rise to £29m.

YOHAN CABAYE
(Crystal Palace)
Originally made his mark in the Premier League with Newcastle United and brought back by Palace this summer from French side Paris Saint-Germain.

JORDY CLASIE
(Southampton)
Dutch midfielder known to former Feyenoord boss Ronald Koeman. Not a direct replacement for Schneiderlin but comparisons are inevitable.

Winner...Arsenal's Oliver Giroud takes on Everton in the Asia Trophy Final

New boy... Yann Kermorgant of Bournemouth

FIXTURES

AUGUST 8, 2015

Bournemouth v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Swansea City
Everton v Watford
Leicester City v Sunderland
Manchester United v Tottenham
Newcastle United v Southampton
Norwich City v Crystal Palace

AUGUST 9, 2015

Arsenal v West Ham United
Stoke City v Liverpool

AUGUST 10, 2015

WBA v Manchester City

AUGUST 14, 2015

Aston Villa v Manchester United

AUGUST 15, 2015

Southampton v Everton
Sunderland v Norwich City
Swansea City v Newcastle United
Tottenham v Stoke City
Watford v WBA
West Ham United v Leicester City

AUGUST 16, 2015

Crystal Palace v Arsenal
Manchester City v Chelsea

AUGUST 17, 2015

Liverpool v Bournemouth

AUGUST 22, 2015

Crystal Palace v Aston Villa
Leicester City v Tottenham
Manchester United v Newcastle United
Norwich City v Stoke City
Sunderland v Swansea City
Watford v Southampton
West Ham United v Bournemouth

AUGUST 23, 2015

Everton v Manchester City
WBA v Chelsea

AUGUST 24, 2015

Arsenal v Liverpool

AUGUST 29, 2015

Aston Villa v Sunderland
Bournemouth v Leicester City
Chelsea v Crystal Palace
Liverpool v West Ham United
Manchester City v Watford
Newcastle United v Arsenal
Stoke City v WBA
Tottenham v Everton

AUGUST 30, 2015

Southampton v Norwich City
Swansea City v Manchester United

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015

Arsenal v Stoke City
Crystal Palace v Manchester City
Everton v Chelsea
Manchester United v Liverpool
Norwich City v Bournemouth
Watford v Swansea City
WBA v Southampton

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Leicester City v Aston Villa
Sunderland v Tottenham

SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

West Ham United v Newcastle United

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

Aston Villa v WBA
Bournemouth v Sunderland
Chelsea v Arsenal
Liverpool v Norwich City
Manchester City v West Ham United
Newcastle United v Watford
Stoke City v Leicester City
Swansea City v Everton

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Southampton v Manchester United
Tottenham v Crystal Palace

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015

Leicester City v Arsenal
Liverpool v Aston Villa
Manchester United v Sunderland
Newcastle United v Chelsea
Southampton v Swansea City
Stoke City v Bournemouth
Tottenham v Manchester City
West Ham United v Norwich City

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Watford v Crystal Palace

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

WBA v Everton

OCTOBER 3, 2015

Arsenal v Manchester United
Aston Villa v Stoke City
Bournemouth v Watford
Chelsea v Southampton
Crystal Palace v WBA
Everton v Liverpool
Manchester City v Newcastle United
Norwich City v Leicester City
Sunderland v West Ham United
Swansea City v Tottenham

OCTOBER 17, 2015

Chelsea v Aston Villa
Crystal Palace v West Ham United
Everton v Manchester United
Manchester City v Bournemouth
Newcastle United v Norwich City
Southampton v Leicester City
Swansea City v Stoke City
Tottenham v Liverpool
Watford v Arsenal
WBA v Sunderland

OCTOBER 24, 2015

Arsenal v Everton
Aston Villa v Swansea City
Bournemouth v Tottenham
Leicester City v Crystal Palace
Liverpool v Southampton
Manchester United v Manchester City
Norwich City v WBA
Stoke City v Watford
Sunderland v Newcastle United
West Ham United v Chelsea

OCTOBER 31, 2015

Chelsea v Liverpool
Crystal Palace v Manchester United
Everton v Sunderland
Manchester City v Norwich City
Newcastle United v Stoke City
Southampton v Bournemouth
Swansea City v Arsenal
Tottenham v Aston Villa
Watford v West Ham United
WBA v Leicester City

NOVEMBER 7, 2015

Arsenal v Tottenham
Aston Villa v Manchester City
Bournemouth v Newcastle United
Leicester City v Watford
Liverpool v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v WBA
Norwich City v Swansea City
Stoke City v Chelsea
Sunderland v Southampton
West Ham United v Everton

NOVEMBER 21, 2015

Chelsea v Norwich City
Crystal Palace v Sunderland
Everton v Aston Villa
Manchester City v Liverpool
Newcastle United v Leicester City
Southampton v Stoke City
Swansea City v Bournemouth
Tottenham v West Ham United
Watford v Manchester United
WBA v Arsenal

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

Aston Villa v Watford
Bournemouth v Everton
Crystal Palace v Newcastle United
Leicester City v Manchester United
Liverpool v Swansea City
Manchester City v Southampton
Norwich City v Arsenal
Sunderland v Stoke City
Tottenham v Chelsea
West Ham United v WBA

DECEMBER 5, 2015

Arsenal v Sunderland
Chelsea v Bournemouth
Everton v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v West Ham United
Newcastle United v Liverpool
Southampton v Aston Villa
Stoke City v Manchester City
Swansea City v Leicester City
Watford v Norwich City
WBA v Tottenham

DECEMBER 12, 2015

Aston Villa v Arsenal
Bournemouth v Manchester United
Crystal Palace v Southampton
Leicester City v Chelsea
Liverpool v WBA
Manchester City v Swansea City
Norwich City v Everton
Sunderland v Watford
Tottenham v Newcastle United
West Ham United v Stoke City

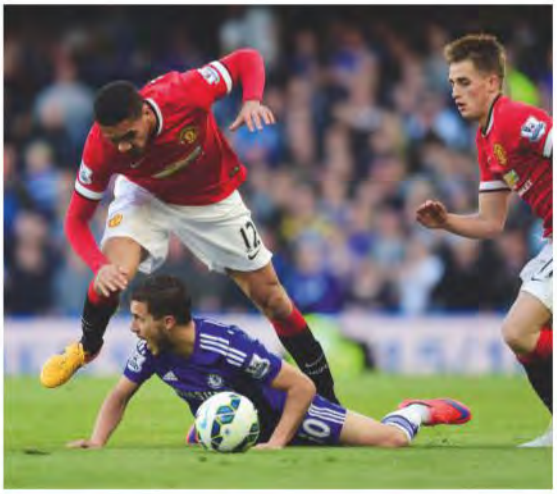
DECEMBER 19, 2015

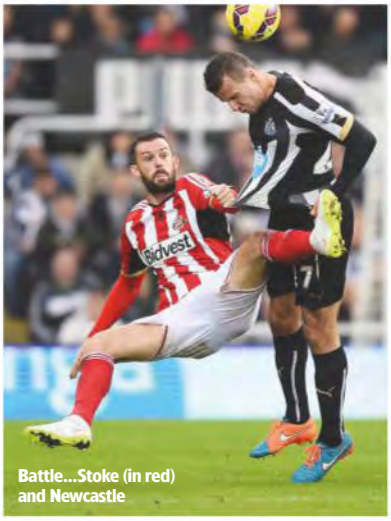
Arsenal v Manchester City
Chelsea v Sunderland
Everton v Leicester City
Manchester United v Norwich City
Newcastle United v Aston Villa
Southampton v Tottenham
Stoke City v Crystal Palace
Swansea City v West Ham United
Watford v Liverpool
WBA v Bournemouth

DECEMBER 26, 2015

Aston Villa v West Ham United
Bournemouth v Crystal Palace
Chelsea v Watford
Liverpool v Leicester City
Manchester City v Sunderland
Newcastle United v Everton
Southampton v Arsenal
Stoke City v Manchester United
Swansea City v WBA
Tottenham v Norwich City

Competitive...Graziano Pelle of Southampton (right)


Marked man...Chelsea's Eden Hazard is floored by Manchester United


Battle...Stoke (in red) and Newcastle

DECEMBER 28, 2015

Arsenal v Bournemouth
Crystal Palace v Swansea City
Everton v Stoke City
Leicester City v Manchester City
Manchester United v Chelsea
Norwich City v Aston Villa
Sunderland v Liverpool
Watford v Tottenham
WBA v Newcastle United
West Ham United v Southampton

JANUARY 2, 2016

Arsenal v Newcastle United
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Everton v Tottenham
Leicester City v Bournemouth
Manchester United v Swansea City
Norwich City v Southampton
Sunderland v Aston Villa
Watford v Manchester City
WBA v Stoke City
West Ham United v Liverpool

JANUARY 12, 2016

Aston Villa v Crystal Palace
Bournemouth v West Ham United
Liverpool v Arsenal
Swansea City v Sunderland

JANUARY 13, 2016

Chelsea v WBA
Manchester City v Everton
Newcastle United v Manchester United
Southampton v Watford
Stoke City v Norwich City
Tottenham v Leicester City

JANUARY 16, 2016

Aston Villa v Leicester City
Bournemouth v Norwich City
Chelsea v Everton
Liverpool v Manchester United
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v West Ham United
Southampton v WBA
Stoke City v Arsenal
Swansea City v Watford
Tottenham v Sunderland

JANUARY 23, 2016

Arsenal v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Tottenham
Everton v Swansea City
Leicester City v Stoke City
Manchester United v Southampton
Norwich City v Liverpool
Sunderland v Bournemouth
Watford v Newcastle United
WBA v Aston Villa
West Ham United v Manchester City

FEBRUARY 2, 2016

Arsenal v Southampton
Crystal Palace v Bournemouth
Leicester City v Liverpool
Manchester United v Stoke City
Norwich City v Tottenham
Sunderland v Manchester City
Watford v Chelsea
WBA v Swansea City
West Ham United v Aston Villa

FEBRUARY 3, 2016

Everton v Newcastle United

FEBRUARY 6, 2016

Aston Villa v Norwich City
Bournemouth v Arsenal
Chelsea v Manchester United
Liverpool v Sunderland
Manchester City v Leicester City
Newcastle United v WBA
Southampton v West Ham United
Stoke City v Everton
Swansea City v Crystal Palace
Tottenham v Watford

FEBRUARY 13, 2016

Arsenal v Leicester City
Aston Villa v Liverpool
Bournemouth v Stoke City
Chelsea v Newcastle United
Crystal Palace v Watford
Everton v WBA
Manchester City v Tottenham
Norwich City v West Ham United
Sunderland v Manchester United
Swansea City v Southampton

FEBRUARY 27, 2016

Leicester City v Norwich City
Liverpool v Everton
Manchester United v Arsenal
Newcastle United v Manchester City
Southampton v Chelsea
Stoke City v Aston Villa
Tottenham v Swansea City
Watford v Bournemouth
WBA v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Sunderland

MARCH 1, 2016

Arsenal v Swansea City
Aston Villa v Everton
Bournemouth v Southampton
Leicester City v WBA
Liverpool v Manchester City
Manchester United v Watford
Norwich City v Chelsea
Sunderland v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Tottenham

MARCH 2, 2016

Stoke City v Newcastle United

MARCH 5, 2016

Chelsea v Stoke City
Crystal Palace v Liverpool
Everton v West Ham United
Manchester City v Aston Villa
Newcastle United v Bournemouth
Southampton v Sunderland
Swansea City v Norwich City
Tottenham v Arsenal
Watford v Leicester City
WBA v Manchester United

MARCH 12, 2016

Arsenal v WBA
Aston Villa v Tottenham
Bournemouth v Swansea City
Leicester City v Newcastle United
Liverpool v Chelsea
Manchester United v Crystal Palace
Norwich City v Manchester City
Stoke City v Southampton
Sunderland v Everton
West Ham United v Watford

MARCH 19, 2016

Chelsea v West Ham United
Crystal Palace v Leicester City
Everton v Arsenal
Manchester City v Manchester United
Newcastle United v Sunderland
Southampton v Liverpool
Swansea City v Aston Villa
Tottenham v Bournemouth
Watford v Stoke City
WBA v Norwich City

APRIL 2, 2016

Arsenal v Watford
Aston Villa v Chelsea
Bournemouth v Manchester City
Leicester City v Southampton
Liverpool v Tottenham
Manchester United v Everton
Norwich City v Newcastle United
Stoke City v Swansea City
Sunderland v WBA
West Ham United v Crystal Palace

APRIL 9, 2016

Aston Villa v Bournemouth
Crystal Palace v Norwich City
Liverpool v Stoke City
Manchester City v WBA
Southampton v Newcastle United
Sunderland v Leicester City
Swansea City v Chelsea
Tottenham v Manchester United
Watford v Everton
West Ham United v Arsenal

APRIL 16, 2016

Arsenal v Crystal Palace
Bournemouth v Liverpool
Chelsea v Manchester City
Everton v Southampton
Leicester City v West Ham United
Manchester United v Aston Villa
Newcastle United v Swansea City
Norwich City v Sunderland
Stoke City v Tottenham
WBA v Watford

APRIL 23, 2016

Aston Villa v Southampton
Bournemouth v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Everton
Leicester City v Swansea City
Liverpool v Newcastle United
Manchester City v Stoke City
Norwich City v Watford
Sunderland v Arsenal
Tottenham v WBA
West Ham United v Manchester United

APRIL 30, 2016

Arsenal v Norwich City
Chelsea v Tottenham
Everton v Bournemouth
Manchester United v Leicester City
Newcastle United v Crystal Palace
Southampton v Manchester City
Stoke City v Sunderland
Swansea City v Liverpool
Watford v Aston Villa
WBA v West Ham United

MAY 7, 2016

Aston Villa v Newcastle United
Bournemouth v WBA
Crystal Palace v Stoke City
Leicester City v Everton
Liverpool v Watford
Manchester City v Arsenal
Norwich City v Manchester United
Sunderland v Chelsea
Tottenham v Southampton
West Ham United v Swansea City

MAY 15, 2016

Arsenal v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Leicester City
Everton v Norwich City
Manchester United v Bournemouth
Newcastle United v Tottenham
Southampton v Crystal Palace
Stoke City v West Ham United
Swansea City v Manchester City
Watford v Sunderland
WBA v Liverpool

(All dates subject to change)

Same old, same old for PSG

Permanent...PSG took up an option to sign Serge Aurier

At the risk of enraging supporters of clubs other than Paris Saint-Germain, it is hard to avoid the fact that domestic football in France these days pretty much starts and ends with what happens in the capital.

Once again, Ligue 1 looks like being nothing more than a parade ground for PSG to win a fourth consecutive title; there really is nothing to suggest any of the top flight's 19 other clubs will be able to offer anything remotely approaching serious competition.

Last season PSG pulled off an unprecedented domestic quadruple, bagging the Champions Trophy, the League Cup, Ligue 1 and the French Cup. And this in a season when UEFA's Financial Fairplay rules were still forcing the club to operate under some pretty harsh sanctions. PSG were allowed to buy one player for a fee of up to €60million before the start of the season and had to reduce their Champions League squad to 21 players after exceeding permitted financial losses in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

However, last month UEFA did an about-turn and opted to relax their sanctions, supposedly in an effort to make more teams competitive and make sure more clubs are attractive to investors in the future.

"We are just evolving from a period of austerity to one where we can offer more opportunities for sustainable growth and development," said UEFA president Michel Platini. But what he didn't mention in his seemingly magnanimous statement, was the fact that before the relaxation both PSG and Manchester City – the two clubs whose challenges to Europe's footballing elite have been most effectively bankrolled – were seriously considering legal challenges to the Fairplay rules as anti-competitive and a restraint of trade.

PSG had also been limited to a €60m transfer budget for this summer and they had already committed €12m to completing the signing of full-back Serge Aurier from Toulouse following a loan period. But although this sanction no longer applies, which is clearly good news for PSG, things might not be quite as rosy as they might first appear.

According to a recent report in the ▸

PROMOTED TEAMS

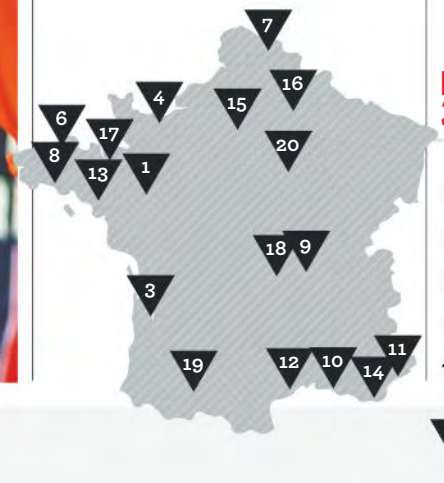
▲ TROYES
After winning Ligue 2 at a canter, it will be interesting to see if they can hang tough in Ligue 1. Can 38-year-old Benjamin Nivet, their top scorer last season with 11 goals, help them survive?

▸ GFC AJACCIO
The Corsicans will be playing in Ligue 1 for the first time in their 55-year history. Unfortunately, it might just prove too much for them.

▸ ANGERS
Grabbed the third promotion slot and return to the big time after an absence of 21 years.

NEW COACHES

▲ HERVE RENARD
(Lille)
The much-travelled 46-year-old arrives after a short yet successful spell coaching Ivory Coast, who he led to succes at the 2015 African Nations Cup.



FRENCH LIGUE 1 2015-16

1 Angers	**11** Monaco
2 Bastia	**12** Montpellier
3 Bordeaux	**13** Nantes
4 Caen	**14** Nice
5 GFC Ajaccio	**15** Paris Saint-Germain
6 Guingamp	**16** Reims
7 Lille	**17** Rennes
8 Lorient	**18** Saint-Etienne
9 Lyon	**19** Toulouse
10 Marseille	**20** Troyes

Le Parisien, UEFA's overall relaxation of the rules may not be as advantageous to PSG as they might first have thought. The newspaper has apparently seen documents that, if approved, would change the playing field yet again.

All clubs currently involved in European competition are obliged to run their financial affairs with maximum losses over the last three seasons of €45m. However, there could soon be clubs that would be exempt from this constraint, beginning with the current season. If a club is now taken over by a new investor, and if these new investors have their business plans accepted by UEFA, then they will be allowed to exceed the aforementioned maximum losses for up to four seasons and will not be sanctioned for failing to comply. The problem is that these exemptions will only apply to new investors. So if these ideas are adopted by UEFA, then clubs such as PSG and Manchester City, while having many of their personal restrictions lifted, will find themselves punished once again, this time for being "first movers" into a new space.

The fight between PSG and UEFA will clearly go on in the short term as both parties look to find a workable solution, but relations between them are still very strained, despite the club's more comfortable financial situation right now.

Still, with more money freed up for immediate transfer movement into the French capital, there have been a number of wild rumours doing the rounds as to who will be heading to the capital before the transfer window closes.

Among the more outrageous suggestions was the idea that Cristiano Ronaldo could be tempted to swap Spain for France. The Real Madrid star's arrival, according to reports, depended on PSG being able to offload striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Coach Laurent Blanc will doubtless have been spending plenty of time wrestling with his single trickiest recruitment problem: who can really help the club move towards the avowed goal of winning the Champions League? Can they attract the kind of players – right now – who can genuinely mount a challenge for Europe's biggest prize?

Blanc will hope that Angel Di Maria, a far more realistic target than Cristiano Ronaldo, falls into that category. The Argentinian put a terrible season at Manchester United behind him by signing in a deal worth €63m. The transfer made him, cumulatively, the world's most expensive player, having cost a total of €179m in fees during his career.

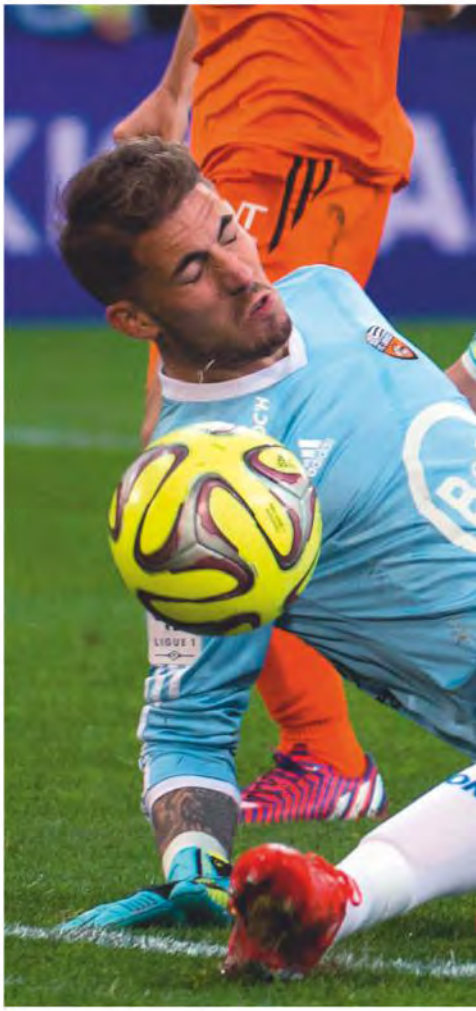
Aside from Di Maria, Blanc's only new signing of note was that of goalkeeper Kevin Trapp from Eintracht Frankfurt to offer some competition to Salvatore Sirigu. The only big name heading out of the door, was midfielder Yohan Cabaye, who returned to England, joining Crystal Palace, after an unhappy 18 months with the club.

There are still an awful lot of loose ends that need to be tied up if PSG are to start their latest campaign in a state of genuine readiness for Europe.

Blanc knows that winning the domestic title – and winning it well – is the absolute minimum requirement for the club's ultra-ambitious top brass. Especially when transfer movement elsewhere in France has been tepid, to say the least.

Although they have signed defender Karim Rekik from Manchester City and Argentinian winger Lucas Ocampos from Monaco, Marseille lost three key players in

Major signing... PSG new boy Angel Di Maria



ONES TO WATCH

ADAMA TRAORE
(Monaco)
The 20-year-old Mali midfielder – named best player at the Under-20 World Cup in June – was signed from Lille for €14m after just 27 senior games.

FARES BAHLOULI
(Monaco)
A Lyon academy product, the 20-year-old Franco-Algerian midfielder is one of French football's hottest prospects. Signed a five-year deal in June.

ALEXANDRE LACAZETTE
(Lyon)
How has a goalscorer as prolific and dynamic as Lacazette not aroused serious interest from Europe's elite? The country's most lethal attacking force.

JAVIER PASTORE
(Paris Saint-Germain)
The jury was out for a while on the Argentinian midfielder, but he turned in his best season last campaign. And if Eric Cantona says he's the best in the world...

NABIL FEKIR
(Lyon)
Voted last season's best young player in Ligue 1, the 22-year-old midfielder must now prove that he has the staying power to do it all again.

Andre-Pierre Gignac (Tigres), Giannelli Imbula (Porto) and Dimitri Payet (West Ham United). To add to their problems, coach Marcelo Bielsa quit after an opening weekend defeat at Caen.

Monaco themselves have lost Dimitar Berbatov to retirement, while Radamel Falcao has been sent out on loan again, this time to Chelsea. So it's hard to see coach Leonardo Jardim pushing his team further than their third-place finish last time out.

Which leaves Lyon as the only other serious outfit in the ball park, and they finished a not-inconsiderable eight points behind PSG last season in second place.

Financial restrictions or no financial restrictions, it really is head-scratchingly difficult to see anyone who can truly rattle the PSG cage. With three consecutive Ligue 1 titles behind them and with a squad that easily outstrips anything else France has to offer, it would be a very brave man indeed who would bet against them making it four in a row.

Howard Johnson

OM man...Argentinian winger Lucas Ocampos (above right)

TALKING POINTS

- If someone makes Lyon an offer they can't refuse for Alexandre Lacazette, do they have a ready-made replacement in 27-year-old Claudio Beauvue, who was signed for €5million in the summer after scoring an impressive 17 goals in 36 league games for Guingamp last term?
- Lille have a new coach in Herve Renard after finishing a disappointing eighth last season. He needs to improve a listless side who lost key players Simon Kjaer (Fenerbahce) and Idrissa Gueye (Aston Villa) in the close season.
- Once touted as a nailed-on superstar of the future, Ryad Boudebouz lost his way after a bright start at Sochaux and spent the last two seasons at lowly Bastia. Now Montpellier have given him the chance, can the Algeria midfielder finally fulfil his potential?
- When Russian money arrived at Monaco in 2011 all the talk was all about building a powerhouse to rival Paris. But the club's policy of selling their best players would appear to put a question mark over any real ambition.
- After an impressive season on loan from Toulouse, PSG picked up their option on Serge Aurier in April. The talented 22-year-old Ivorian right-back could be a superstar in the making.
- One of France's most naturally-talented midfielders of recent years, Yoann Gourcuff suffered 20 injuries in five seasons with Lyon and made just 23 full appearances after arriving from Bordeaux. Released at the end of his contract last season, will we ever see him again?
- After FIFA ruled Hatem Ben Arfa could not pull on a Nice shirt last season after already playing for two clubs, the south-coast outfit quickly said goodbye to him without him playing a game. President Jean-Pierre Rivere then said in May that Ben Arfa will remain. Might he actually get to wear the shirt this time?

Back again...Ben Arfa has returned to Nice

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
(Paris Saint-Germain)
After a poor season by his standards, where injuries and suspensions took their toll, the Swede needs to bounce back and demonstrate who's boss.

KARIM REKIK
(Marseille)
The 20-year-old Dutch centre back arrives in France from Manchester City for €5m, having impressed on loan at PSV for two seasons.

THIAGO SILVA
(Paris Saint-Germain)
The talismanic club captain remains one of the world's best defenders and will again be instrumental in PSG's campaign to go bigger and better.

CLAUDIO BEAUVUE
(Lyon)
A fantastic season for Guingamp which yielded 17 league goals saw the 27-year-old Guadaloupe striker move to Lyon for €4.5m in the summer.

STEPHAN EL SHAARAWY
(Monaco)
The 22-year-old Italian striker has made a loan move to Monaco and will be looking to get his career back on track after going off the boil at Milan.

Collision course... Lorient's Pape Paye (left) and Grejohn Kyei of Reims

Last term...Nice's game at Bastia (in blue) was halted when fans threw objects onto the pitch

FIXTURES

AUGUST 7, 2015

Lille v Paris Saint-Germain

AUGUST 8, 2015

Bastia v Rennes
Bordeaux v Reims
GFC Ajaccio v Troyes
Lyon v Lorient
Marseille v Caen
Montpellier v Angers
Nantes v Guingamp
Nice v Monaco
Toulouse v Saint-Etienne

AUGUST 15, 2015

Angers v Nantes
Caen v Toulouse
Guingamp v Lyon
Lorient v Bastia
Monaco v Lille
Paris Saint-Germain v GFC Ajaccio
Reims v Marseille
Rennes v Montpellier
Saint-Etienne v Bordeaux
Troyes v Nice

AUGUST 22, 2015

Bastia v Guingamp
GFC Ajaccio v Angers
Lille v Bordeaux
Lorient v Saint-Etienne
Lyon v Rennes
Marseille v Troyes
Montpellier v Paris Saint-Germain
Nantes v Reims
Nice v Caen
Toulouse v Monaco

AUGUST 29, 2015

Angers v Nice
Bordeaux v Nantes
Caen v Lyon
Guingamp v Marseille
Lille v GFC Ajaccio
Monaco v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Lorient
Rennes v Toulouse
Saint-Etienne v Bastia
Troyes v Montpellier

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015

GFC Ajaccio v Monaco
Lorient v Angers
Lyon v Lille
Marseille v Bastia
Montpellier v Saint-Etienne
Nantes v Rennes
Nice v Guingamp
Paris Saint-Germain v Bordeaux
Toulouse v Reims
Troyes v Caen

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

Angers v Troyes
Bastia v Nice
Bordeaux v Toulouse
Caen v Montpellier
Guingamp v GFC Ajaccio
Marseille v Lyon
Monaco v Lorient
Reims v Paris Saint-Germain
Rennes v Lille
Saint-Etienne v Nantes

SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

Angers v Reims
GFC Ajaccio v Rennes
Lille v Nantes
Lorient v Caen
Lyon v Bastia
Montpellier v Monaco
Nice v Bordeaux
Paris Saint-Germain v Guingamp
Toulouse v Marseille
Troyes v Saint-Etienne

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015

Bastia v Toulouse
Caen v GFC Ajaccio
Bordeaux v Lyon
Guingamp v Monaco
Marseille v Angers
Montpellier v Lorient
Nantes v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Lille
Rennes v Troyes
Saint-Etienne v Nice

OCTOBER 3, 2015

Angers v Bastia
Caen v Saint-Etienne
GFC Ajaccio v Toulouse
Lille v Montpellier
Lorient v Bordeaux
Lyon v Reims
Monaco v Rennes
Nice v Nantes
Paris Saint-Germain v Marseille
Troyes v Guingamp

OCTOBER 17, 2015

Bastia v Paris Saint-Germain
Bordeaux v Montpellier
Guingamp v Lille
Marseille v Lorient
Monaco v Lyon
Nantes v Troyes
Reims v Caen
Rennes v Nice
Saint-Etienne v GFC Ajaccio
Toulouse v Angers

OCTOBER 24, 2015

Angers v Guingamp
Bordeaux v Troyes
Caen v Nantes
GFC Ajaccio v Nice
Lille v Marseille
Lorient v Rennes
Lyon v Toulouse
Montpellier v Bordeaux
Paris Saint-Germain v Saint-Etienne
Reims v Monaco

OCTOBER 31, 2015

Bastia v Caen
GFC Ajaccio v Bordeaux
Guingamp v Lorient
Monaco v Angers
Nantes v Marseille
Nice v Lille
Rennes v Paris Saint-Germain
Saint-Etienne v Reims
Toulouse v Montpellier
Troyes v Lyon

NOVEMBER 7, 2015

Angers v Rennes
Bordeaux v Monaco
Lorient v Troyes
Lille v Bastia
Montpellier v Nantes
Marseille v Nice
Lyon v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Toulouse
Caen v Guingamp
Reims v GFC Ajaccio

NOVEMBER 21, 2015

Bastia v GFC Ajaccio
Caen v Angers
Guingamp v Toulouse
Lorient v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Nantes
Montpellier v Reims
Nice v Lyon
Rennes v Bordeaux
Saint-Etienne v Marseille
Troyes v Lille

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

Angers v Lille
Bordeaux v Caen
GFC Ajaccio v Lorient
Lyon v Montpellier
Marseille v Monaco
Nantes v Bastia
Paris Saint-Germain v Troyes
Reims v Rennes
Saint-Etienne v Guingamp
Toulouse v Nice

DECEMBER 2, 2015

Angers v Paris Saint-Germain
Bastia v Bordeaux
Guingamp v Reims
Lille v Saint-Etienne
Lorient v Nice
Monaco v Caen
Montpellier v GFC Ajaccio
Nantes v Lyon
Rennes v Marseille
Troyes v Toulouse

DECEMBER 5, 2015

Bastia v Monaco
Bordeaux v Guingamp
Caen v Lille
GFC Ajaccio v Nantes
Lyon v Angers
Marseille v Montpellier
Nice v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Troyes
Saint-Etienne v Rennes
Toulouse v Lorient

DECEMBER 12, 2015

Angers v Bordeaux
Lille v Lorient
Marseille v GFC Ajaccio
Monaco v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Guingamp
Nantes v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon
Reims v Nice
Rennes v Caen
Troyes v Bastia

DECEMBER 19, 2015

Bastia v Reims
Bordeaux v Marseille
Caen v Paris Saint-Germain
GFC Ajaccio v Lyon
Guingamp v Rennes
Lorient v Nantes
Nice v Montpellier
Saint-Etienne v Angers
Toulouse v Lille
Troyes v Monaco

JANUARY 9, 2016

Angers v Caen
Lille v Nice
Lyon v Troyes
Marseille v Guingamp
Monaco v GFC Ajaccio
Montpellier v Bordeaux
Nantes v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Bastia
Reims v Toulouse
Rennes v Lorient

Clash...Nantes' Jordan Veretout (left) collides with Yohan Mollo of Saint-Etienne

New challenge...Bordeaux's Wahbi Khazri and Yoann Andreu (right) of promoted Angers

JANUARY 16, 2016

Bastia v Montpellier
Bordeaux v Lille
Caen v Marseille
GFC Ajaccio v Reims
Guingamp v Nantes
Lorient v Monaco
Nice v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Lyon
Toulouse v Paris Saint-Germain
Troyes v Rennes

JANUARY 23, 2016

Guingamp v Bastia
Lille v Troyes
Lyon v Marseille
Monaco v Toulouse
Montpellier v Caen
Nantes v Bordeaux
Nice v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Angers
Reims v Saint-Etienne
Rennes v GFC Ajaccio

JANUARY 30, 2016

Angers v Monaco
Bastia v Lyon
Bordeaux v Rennes
Caen v Nice
GFC Ajaccio v Montpellier
Lorient v Reims
Marseille v Lille
Saint-Etienne v Paris Saint-Germain
Toulouse v Guingamp
Troyes v Nantes

FEBRUARY 3, 2016

Guingamp v Troyes
Lille v Caen
Lyon v Bordeaux
Monaco v Bastia
Montpellier v Marseille
Nantes v GFC Ajaccio
Nice v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Reims v Angers
Rennes v Saint-Etienne

FEBRUARY 6, 2016

Angers v Lyon
Bastia v Troyes
Bordeaux v Saint-Etienne
Caen v Reims
GFC Ajaccio v Guingamp
Lille v Rennes
Lorient v Montpellier
Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Nice
Toulouse v Nantes

FEBRUARY 13, 2016

Guingamp v Bordeaux
Lyon v Caen
Montpellier v Toulouse
Nantes v Lorient
Nice v Marseille
Paris Saint-Germain v Lille
Reims v Bastia
Rennes v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Monaco
Troyes v GFC Ajaccio

FEBRUARY 20, 2016

Angers v Montpellier
Bastia v Nantes
Bordeaux v Nice
Caen v Rennes
Lille v Lyon
Lorient v Guingamp
Marseille v Saint-Etienne
Monaco v Troyes
Paris Saint-Germain v Reims
Toulouse v GFC Ajaccio

FEBRUARY 27, 2016

GFC Ajaccio v Marseille
Guingamp v Angers
Lyon v Paris Saint-Germain
Montpellier v Lille
Nantes v Monaco
Nice v Bastia
Reims v Bordeaux
Saint-Etienne v Caen
Toulouse v Rennes
Troyes v Lorient

MARCH 5, 2016

Angers v Saint-Etienne
Bastia v Lorient
Bordeaux v Ajaccio
Caen v Monaco
Lille v Reims
Lyon v Guingamp
Marseille v Toulouse
Nice v Troyes
Paris Saint-Germain v Montpellier
Rennes v Nantes

MARCH 12, 2016

Bastia v Lille
GFC Ajaccio v Caen
Guingamp v Saint-Etienne
Lorient v Marseille
Monaco v Reims
Montpellier v Nice
Nantes v Angers
Rennes v Lyon
Toulouse v Bordeaux
Troyes v Paris Saint-Germai

MARCH 19, 2016

Angers v Lorient
Bordeaux v Bastia
Caen v Troyes
Lille v Toulouse
Lyon v Nantes
Marseille v Rennes
Nice v GFC Ajaccio
Paris Saint-Germain v Monaco
Reims v Guingamp
Saint-Etienne v Montpellier

APRIL 2, 2016

Bastia v Marseille
GFC Ajaccio v Saint-Etienne
Guingamp v Montpellier
Lorient v Lyon
Monaco v Bordeaux
Nantes v Lille
Paris Saint-Germain v Nice
Rennes v Reims
Toulouse v Caen
Troyes v Angers

APRIL 9, 2016

Angers v GFC Ajaccio
Caen v Lorient
Guingamp v Paris Saint-Germain
Lille v Monaco
Marseille v Bordeaux
Montpellier v Lyon
Nice v Rennes
Reims v Nantes
Saint-Etienne v Troyes
Toulouse v Bastia

APRIL 16, 2016

Bastia v Saint-Etienne
Bordeaux v Angers
GFC Ajaccio v Lille
Lorient v Toulouse
Lyon v Nice
Monaco v Marseille
Nantes v Montpellier
Paris Saint-Germain v Caen
Rennes v Guingamp
Troyes v Reims

APRIL 24, 2016

Bordeaux v Paris Saint-Germain
GFC Ajaccio v Bastia
Guingamp v Caen
Lille v Angers
Marseille v Nantes
Montpellier v Troyes
Nice v Reims
Rennes v Monaco
Saint-Etienne v Lorient
Toulouse v Lyon

APRIL 30, 2016

Angers v Marseille
Caen v Bastia
Lorient v Lille
Lyon v GFC Ajaccio
Monaco v Guingamp
Nantes v Nice
Paris Saint-Germain v Rennes
Reims v Montpellier
Saint-Etienne v Toulouse
Troyes v Bordeaux

MAY 7, 2016

Bastia v Angers
Bordeaux v Lorient
GFC Ajaccio v Paris Saint-Germain
Lille v Guingamp
Lyon v Monaco
Marseille v Reims
Montpellier v Rennes
Nantes v Caen
Nice v Saint-Etienne
Toulouse v Troyes

MAY 14, 2016

Angers v Toulouse
Caen v Bordeaux
Guingamp v Nice
Lorient v GFC Ajaccio
Monaco v Montpellier
Paris Saint-Germain v Nantes
Reims v Lyon
Rennes v Bastia
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Troyes v Marseille

(All dates subject to change)

Bayern aim to make history

Gamble...Bayern spent €30m on Brazilian midfielder Douglas Costa (left)

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA 2015-16

1 Augsburg
2 Bayer Leverkusen
3 Bayern Munich
4 Borussia Dortmund
5 Borussia Monchengladbach
6 Cologne
7 Darmstadt
8 Eintracht Frankfurt
9 Hamburg
10 Hanover
11 Hertha Berlin
12 Hoffenheim *(Sinsheim)*
13 Ingolstadt
14 Mainz
15 Schalke *(Gelsenkirchen)*
16 Stuttgart
17 Werder Bremen
18 Wolfsburg

Tough...Thomas Tuchel has big shoes to fill at Dortmund after replacing Klopp

Besides their huge financial resources, ability to attract the best players from home and abroad, and the fear factor that they inspire in opponents, Bayern Munich will start the new season with another crucial advantage: a ravenous hunger and a relentless quest for new targets.

After completely dominating the last three domestic campaigns – finishing 25 points ahead of the chasing pack in 2013, 19 clear in 2014 and, despite coasting for the final month, 10 points to the good in May – Bayern now have their sights set on becoming the first team in Bundesliga history to win four straight titles. And should any player not be aware of just how important that is, the club's hard-nosed sporting director Matthias Sammer is only too willing to spell it out.

"No one ever has achieved four consecutive championships and it's an obvious objective for us," declared Sammer on the first day of pre-season training.

"The team have to do their duty. The responsibility is theirs. They have to make sure that everyone pulls together for the right results.

"We've a first-class squad, one I'm very satisfied with, and we're in a much better place compared to last season, when we had to contend with a World Cup summer and so many injuries."

With Holger Badstuber and Franck Ribery their only injury concerns this time, and with up-and-coming defensive midfielder Joshua Kimmich and Brazilian attacker Douglas Costa pitching up this summer from RB Leipzig and Shakhtar Donetsk respectively, coach Pep Guardiola seems to have the quantitative and qualitative bases covered.

Not that every indicator has Bayern strolling to their 26th Bundesliga crown. Many believe their defensive frailties – a tendency for individual lapses of concentration and a vulnerability to the counter-attack – have yet to be addressed. Then there is Guardiola's incessant changing of tactics and personnel, which runs the risk of destabilising the side. There is also a worry that German internationals Mario Gotze and Thomas Muller could follow long-serving midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger out of the door.

> "Sessions were so complex under Tuchel, we needed A levels"
>
> **Eugen Polanski on former Mainz boss Thomas Tuchel, who has taken over at Dortmund**

Before his departure for Manchester United, Schweinsteiger was as much the club's standard bearer as he was their outstanding director of operations in the middle of the park. And for a large proportion of Bayern fans, Guardiola is the individual who shot Bambi, effectively ushering their hero to the exit by refusing to guarantee the *Nationalmannschaft*

PROMOTED TEAMS

DARMSTADT
Back in the top flight for the first time since 1982, they were in the third tier 24 months ago and club president Rudiger Fritsch rightly describes their recent exploits as "like a Hollywood film".

INGOLSTADT
An inaugural Bundesliga campaign for the second-tier champions, but don't expect the sympathy vote as underdogs. Due to their links with Audi, poor attendances and just 11 years of existence, they tend to be seen by other clubs' fans as "plastic".

NEW COACHES

ANDRE BREITENREITER *(Schalke)*
The ex-Germany under-21 striker has achieved both Bundesliga promotion and relegation with lowly Paderborn. Is now Schalke's 14th boss in the past decade.

ALEXANDER ZORNIGER *(Stuttgart)*
Sacked by second division fat cats RB Leipzig in February, the 47-year-old has been handed the onerous task of taking over at Stuttgart from Dutch boss Huub Stevens.

RMIN VEH *(Eintracht Frankfurt)*
Much-travelled coach now in his second stint with Eintracht. Won the league with Stuttgart in 2007, he also has taken charge of Hansa Rostock, Wolfsburg and Hamburg.

THOMAS TUCHEL *(Borussia Dortmund)*
Former lower-league defender who coached the Stuttgart and Mainz youth teams before enjoying five years with Mainz seniors, twice reaching the Europa League.

skipper an automatic berth as the deep-lying playmaker.

Accused by some of seeing off two Bayern institutions – Schweinsteiger, plus club doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt – Guardiola does look more than a little isolated. Coaching a club like Bayern can be a thankless task and, after two years of Bundesliga triumphs and Champions League semi-final defeats, what the Spaniard really needs is that European gong. Anything less and his Bayern mission will be deemed a flop.

Almost under as much strain as Guardiola is beleaguered Schalke general manager Horst Heldt, whose post is very much on the line after all the disappointments of last term.

Failure to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in four years, the dour seven-month regime of coach Roberto Di Matteo, a team short on fight and character, and Kevin-Prince Boateng and Sidney Sam suspended for poor attitude made it a campaign to forget. To launch the fightback, Heldt tried to bring in Augsburg's Markus Weinzierl. But clearly no respecter of the Bundesliga food chain, the latter said no, and following abortive negotiations with Belgium national coach Marc Wilmots – who later would claim that Heldt did not want him anyway – the job finally went to Andre Breitenreiter, recently relegated from the Bundesliga with Paderborn and only a qualified coach for two years.

While the appointment of Weinzierl or former Schalke striker Wilmots would have proved extremely popular, the arrival of Breitenreiter has not exactly enthused the masses, and if it does not work out Heldt will simply have to go. Reports abound that Borussia Monchengladbach's highly rated recruitment chief Max Eberl has been contacted by Schalke's top brass. Nor will Heldt appreciate the recent boardroom decision to create a three-man, first-team advisory board, featuring former club coaches Huub Stevens and Mike Buskens, plus ex-Schalke striker Ebbe Sand.

In a bid to keep the players on the straight and narrow, Schalke have handed each professional on their books a 15-page code of conduct in several languages. Maybe the movers and shakers there should take a copy.

Elsewhere in the Ruhr, the stakes are also incredibly high for new Borussia Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel, with the enormous challenge of picking up the baton from Westfalenstadion winner, icon and all-round good guy Jurgen Klopp.

Both men cut their leadership teeth with excellent work at Mainz and are

TALKING POINTS

Challengers...Monchengladbach (in green)

- Who are most likely to take advantage should the sky fall in and Bayern fail to win the title? Well, in the second-half of last term, no team amassed more points than Borussia Monchengladbach. Even though they have lost influential players in holding midfielder Christoph Kramer and striker Max Kruse, they remain the most effervescent and best-organised team in the country.
- Having been shown the door by the club once before, in April 2010, and given Hamburg's lack of financial clout, glut of journeymen in the squad and propensity to panic in the corridors of power, Bruno Labbadia will need a good start to the season to avoid being the first coach to lose his job.

Welcome...new coach Andre Breitenreiter (left) with Schalke general manager Horst Heldt

ONES TO WATCH

ARTURO VIDAL
(Bayern Munich)
Bad boy and midfield powerhouse in one de-luxe package, the Chilean superstar is worth every penny of the €35million Bayern paid Juventus for him.

GONZALO CASTRO
(Borussia Dortmund)
Despite impressing while at Bayer Leverkusen, the versatile midfielder always seemed to go unnoticed by the media. An €11m move to Dortmund is his chance to grab the spotlight.

JOHANNES GEIS
(Schalke)
In excellent form for Mainz last season, the engine-room dynamo and set-piece specialist was much in demand during the summer, but opted for security of a starting spot at Schalke.

THORGAN HAZARD
(Borussia Monchengladbach)
Eden Hazard's younger brother could prove equally important for Gladbach in the coming months, brimming over with skill and zip and able to play in a variety of attacking positions.

CHRISTOPH KRAMER
(Bayer Leverkusen)
After a wonderful two-year loan spell at Gladbach, the defensive midfielder returns to base as a fully-fledged Bundesliga headliner and World Cup winner.

● With new coach Andre Breitenreiter's natural inclination to be unassuming, communicative and very close to his players, Schalke fans will expect a return to the never-say-die, attacking stance that disappeared under his aloof and unapproachable predecessor, Roberto Di Matteo.
● The summer acquisition of Gladbach striker Max Kruse should give Wolfsburg more variety in attack. Could it be enough to mount a sustained title challenge?
● Outstanding in the latter part of the campaign, when he scored three goals in a fortnight last spring – including one on his 19th birthday in a victory over Bayern Munich – Bayer Leverkusen left-winger Julian Brandt could be set for a season to remember.

Back for more... Bruno Labbadia

● Allowed to leave Bayern on a free for Hertha Berlin, midfielder Mitchell Weiser was his own worst enemy and too in love with the celebrity lifestyle in Munich. If he can knuckle down in the capital, Hertha will have pulled off a coup.
● Mainz often sell their best talent then go out and find shrewd replacements. Having lost key midfielder Johannes Geis (Schalke) and top scorer Shinji Okazaki (Leicester City), has general manager Christian Heidel done it again with Basle's Fabian Frei and young goalgetter Florian Niederlechner of Heidenheim?
● For all coach Markus Weinzierl's attention to detail and motivation, Augsburg do not boast the deepest of squads. With the Europa League on the menu, their playing resources will be stretched to the limit and a repeat of last season's fifth place would seem beyond them.
● With Roberto Firmino having gone to Liverpool, who will provide Hoffenheim's attacking-third impulse? Coach Markus Gisdol is banking on striker Mark Uth, who scored 15 goals for Heerenveen in Holland last season, ex-Freiburg right-winger Jonathan Schmid, and German under-21 captain Kevin Volland to fill the gap.
● Bayern spent €30million on Douglas Costa, but the 24-year-old Brazilian was mediocre for Shakhtar Donetsk last term and in his five seasons in the Ukraine league he never has accumulated more than six goals in a single campaign. Will he prove a wise buy?

No sentiment... Guardiola has been accused of forcing out icon Schweinsteiger by refusing to guarantee him a playmaking role

emotional balls of fire on the touchline. However, whereas Klopp is renowned for his humour, warmth, accessibility and solidarity with his crew, Tuchel, 41, is a far colder fish, not at all at ease with the media or fans, and never afraid to publicly criticise his charges. The iron fist might have been accepted in Mainz, but will the expensive stars in yellow-and-black prove equally ready to turn the other cheek?

Dortmund's style of play is likely to change too; the turbocharged attacking moves favoured by Klopp being swapped for more of a possession game. Tuchel is, to all intents and purposes, a disciple of Guardiola, and the Dortmunder will definitely have to be on their toes on the training ground. As Mainz midfielder Eugen Polanski once revealed: "Sessions were so complex under Tuchel, we needed A levels."

The one commodity Tuchel lacks, of course, is time. Time to assess the players at his disposal and time to get his message across, time to find the right blend of line-up. The Dortmund side which only finished seventh last term – thus missing out on the Champions League for the first time since 2011 – was plainly a declining force, and while the new boss will be happy that such key figures as centre-back Mats Hummels and midfield holder Ilkay Gundogan ultimately chose not to leave, the rebuilding job is a massive one.

After splashing out €152million on reinforcements over the past four years, Dortmund have now entered balanced-budget territory – only spending what they raise in the transfer market – and inevitably the new reality will make it even harder for Tuchel to raise the *Schwarz-Gelben* phoenix from the ashes.

With Klopp's ghost in every corner, Tuchel is going to have to learn the art of the exorcist. Another Bundesliga, another campaign of intense pressure.

Nick Bidwell

▲ DANIEL CALIGIURI
(Wolfsburg)
Since joining the Wolves from Freiburg two years ago, the forceful right-winger has improved no end. Rated "International Class" in *Kicker* magazine's end-of-year lists.

▲ TIMO HORN
(Cologne)
Following in the footsteps of such great Cologne keepers as Toni Schumacher and Bodo Illgner, the 22-year-old is not especially spectacular but is immensely steady and secure.

▲ FILIP KOSTIC
(Stuttgart)
Once in his stride, the tricky and elusive Serb left-winger is extremely hard to derail and was a key figure last term in his club's last-minute escape from relegation.

▲ FABIAN SCHAR
(Hoffenheim)
Three-times a Swiss top-flight winner with Basle and regularly involved on the Champions League front, the young centre-back should stiffen the Hoffenheim back-line.

▲ ZLATKO JUNUZOVIC
(Werder Bremen)
The busy Austria attacking midfielder could not stop setting up goals in the Bundesliga last season and it speaks volumes that only Wolfsburg's Kevin De Bruyne made more.

Flying...Hamburg's Ivica Olic hurdles a challenge from Hong Jeon-ho of Augsburg

FIXTURES

AUGUST 14, 2015

Bayern Munich v Hamburg

AUGUST 15, 2015

Augsburg v Hertha Berlin
Bayer Leverkusen v Hoffenheim
Borussia Dortmund v Bor Mon'gladbach
Darmstadt v Hanover
Mainz v Ingolstadt
Werder Bremen v Schalke

AUGUST 16, 2015

Stuttgart v Cologne
Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt

AUGUST 21, 2015

Hertha Berlin v Werder Bremen

AUGUST 22, 2015

Cologne v Wolfsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Augsburg
Hamburg v Stuttgart
Hanover v Bayer Leverkusen
Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich
Schalke v Darmstadt

AUGUST 23, 2015

Ingolstadt v Borussia Dortmund
Bor Mon'gladbach v Mainz

AUGUST 28, 2015

Wolfsburg v Schalke

AUGUST 29, 2015

Augsburg v Ingolstadt
Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen
Cologne v Hamburg
Darmstadt v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Hanover
Stuttgart v Eintracht Frankfurt

AUGUST 30, 2015

Borussia Dortmund v Hertha Berlin
Werder Bremen v Bor Mon'gladbach

SEPTEMBER 11, 2015

Bor Mon'gladbach v Hamburg

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015

Bayer Leverkusen v Darmstadt
Bayern Munich v Augsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Cologne
Ingolstadt v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Borussia Dortmund
Hertha Berlin v Stuttgart

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen
Schalke v Mainz

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015

Mainz v Hoffenheim

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

Augsburg v Hanover
Cologne v Bor Mon'gladbach
Darmstadt v Bayern Munich
Hamburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Werder Bremen v Ingolstadt
Wolfsburg v Hertha Berlin

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Stuttgart v Schalke
Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen

SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Darmstadt v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v Cologne
Ingolstadt v Hamburg

SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

Bayer Leverkusen v Mainz
Bor Mon'gladbach v Augsburg
Hanover v Stuttgart
Hoffenheim v Borussia Dortmund
Schalke v Eintracht Frankfurt

SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

Cologne v Ingolstadt

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015

Augsburg v Hoffenheim
Hamburg v Schalke
Mainz v Bayern Munich
Stuttgart v Bor Mon'gladbach
Werder Bremen v Bayer Leverkusen
Wolfsburg v Hanover

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Borussia Dortmund v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hertha Berlin

OCTOBER 3, 2015

Bayer Leverkusen v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Borussia Dortmund
Bor Mon'gladbach v Wolfsburg
Ingolstadt v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Mainz
Hanover v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v Hamburg
Hoffenheim v Stuttgart
Schalke v Cologne

OCTOBER 17, 2015

Augsburg v Darmstadt
Cologne v Hanover
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bor Mon'gladbach
Hamburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v Borussia Dortmund
Schalke v Hertha Berlin
Stuttgart v Ingolstadt
Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich
Wolfsburg v Hoffenheim

OCTOBER 24, 2015

Bayer Leverkusen v Stuttgart
Bayern Munich v Cologne
Borussia Dortmund v Augsburg
Bor Mon'gladbach v Schalke
Darmstadt v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hoffenheim v Hamburg
Ingolstadt v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Werder Bremen

OCTOBER 31, 2015

Augsburg v Mainz
Cologne v Hoffenheim
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayern Munich
Hamburg v Hanover
Hertha Berlin v Bor Mon'gladbach
Schalke v Ingolstadt
Stuttgart v Darmstadt
Werder Bremen v Borussia Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Bayer Leverkusen

NOVEMBER 7, 2015

Augsburg v Werder Bremen
Bayer Leverkusen v Cologne
Bayern Munich v Stuttgart
Borussia Dortmund v Schalke
Bor Mon'gladbach v Ingolstadt
Darmstadt v Hamburg
Hoffenheim v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hanover v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Wolfsburg

NOVEMBER 21, 2015

Bor Mon'gladbach v Hanover
Cologne v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
Hamburg v Borussia Dortmund
Hertha Berlin v Hoffenheim
Ingolstadt v Darmstadt
Schalke v Bayern Munich
Stuttgart v Augsburg
Wolfsburg v Werder Bremen

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

Augsburg v Wolfsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Schalke
Bayern Munich v Hertha Berlin
Borussia Dortmund v Stuttgart
Darmstadt v Cologne
Hanover v Ingolstadt
Hoffenheim v Bor Mon'gladbach
Mainz v Eintracht Frankfurt
Werder Bremen v Hamburg

Battle...Bayern's Dante shields the ball from Yunus Malli of Mainz

Determined...Werder Bremen's Fin Bartels keeps Borussia Dortmund's Shinji Kagawa at bay

DECEMBER 5, 2015

Bor Mon'gladbach v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Augsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Darmstadt
Hamburg v Mainz
Hertha Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
Ingolstadt v Hoffenheim
Schalke v Hanover
Stuttgart v Werder Bremen
Wolfsburg v Borussia Dortmund

DECEMBER 12, 2015

Augsburg v Schalke
Bayer Leverkusen v Bor Mon'gladbach
Bayern Munich v Ingolstadt
Borussia Dortmund v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Hertha Berlin
Hoffenheim v Hanover
Mainz v Stuttgart
Werder Bremen v Cologne
Wolfsburg v Hamburg

DECEMBER 19, 2015

Bor Mon'gladbach v Darmstadt
Cologne v Borussia Dortmund
Eintracht Frankfurt v Werder Bremen
Hamburg v Augsburg
Hanover v Bayern Munich
Hertha Berlin v Mainz
Ingolstadt v Bayer Leverkusen
Schalke v Hoffenheim
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg

JANUARY 23, 2016

Bor Mon'gladbach v Borussia
DortmundCologne v Stuttgart
Eintracht Frankfurt v Wolfsburg
Hamburg v Bayern Munich
Hanover v Darmstadt
Hertha Berlin v Augsburg
Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen
Ingolstadt v Mainz
Schalke v Werder Bremen

JANUARY 30, 2016

Augsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayer Leverkusen v Hanover
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim
Borussia Dortmund v Ingolstadt
Darmstadt v Schalke
Mainz v Bor Mon'gladbach
Stuttgart v Hamburg
Werder Bremen v Hertha Berlin
Wolfsburg v Cologne

FEBRUARY 6, 2016

Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich
Bor Mon'gladbach v Werder Bremen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Stuttgart
Hamburg v Cologne
Hanover v Mainz
Hertha Berlin v Borussia Dortmund
Hoffenheim v Darmstadt
Ingolstadt v Augsburg
Schalke v Wolfsburg

FEBRUARY 13, 2016

Augsburg v Bayern Munich
Borussia Dortmund v Hanover
Cologne v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Bayer Leverkusen
Hamburg v Bor Mon'gladbach
Mainz v Schalke
Stuttgart v Hertha Berlin
Werder Bremen v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Ingolstadt

FEBRUARY 20, 2016

Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Darmstadt
Bor Mon'gladbach v Cologne
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hamburg
Hanover v Augsburg
Hertha Berlin v Wolfsburg
Hoffenheim v Mainz
Ingolstadt v Werder Bremen
Schalke v Stuttgart

FEBRUARY 27, 2016

Augsburg v Bor Mon'gladbach
Borussia Dortmund v Hoffenheim
Cologne v Hertha Berlin
Eintracht Frankfurt v Schalke
Hamburg v Ingolstadt
Mainz v Bayer Leverkusen
Stuttgart v Hanover
Werder Bremen v Darmstadt
Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich

MARCH 2, 2016

Bayer Leverkusen v Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich v Mainz
Bor Mon'gladbach v Stuttgart
Darmstadt v Borussia Dortmund
Hanover v Wolfsburg
Hertha Berlin v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hoffenheim v Augsburg
Ingolstadt v Cologne
Schalke v Hamburg

MARCH 5, 2016

Borussia Dortmund v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Schalke
Eintracht Frankfurt v Ingolstadt
Augsburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Hamburg v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Darmstadt
Werder Bremen v Hanover
Stuttgart v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Bor Mon'gladbach

MARCH 12, 2016

Bayer Leverkusen v Hamburg
Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen
Borussia Dortmund v Mainz
Bor Mon'gladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Augsburg
Hanover v Cologne
Hertha Berlin v Schalke
Hoffenheim v Wolfsburg
Ingolstadt v Stuttgart

MARCH 19, 2016

Augsburg v Borussia Dortmund
Cologne v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hanover
Hamburg v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Ingolstadt
Schalke v Bor Mon'gladbach
Stuttgart v Bayer Leverkusen
Werder Bremen v Mainz
Wolfsburg v Darmstadt

APRIL 2, 2016

Bayer Leverkusen v Wolfsburg
Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt
Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen
Bor Mon'gladbach v Hertha Berlin
Darmstadt v Stuttgart
Hanover v Hamburg
Hoffenheim v Cologne
Ingolstadt v Schalke
Mainz v Augsburg

APRIL 9, 2016

Cologne v Bayer Leverkusen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hoffenheim
Hamburg v Darmstadt
Hertha Berlin v Hanover
Ingolstadt v Bor Mon'gladbach
Schalke v Borussia Dortmund
Stuttgart v Bayern Munich
Werder Bremen v Augsburg
Wolfsburg v Mainz

APRIL 16, 2016

Augsburg v Stuttgart
Bayer Leverkusen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayern Munich v Schalke
Borussia Dortmund v Hamburg
Darmstadt v Ingolstadt
Hanover v Bor Mon'gladbach
Hoffenheim v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Cologne
Werder Bremen v Wolfsburg

APRIL 23, 2016

Bor Mon'gladbach v Hoffenheim
Cologne v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Mainz
Ingolstadt v Hanover
Hamburg v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich
Schalke v Bayer Leverkusen
Stuttgart v Borussia Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Augsburg

APRIL 30, 2016

Augsburg v Cologne
Bayer Leverkusen v Hertha Berlin
Bayern Munich v Bor Mon'gladbach
Borussia Dortmund v Wolfsburg
Darmstadt v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hanover v Schalke
Hoffenheim v Ingolstadt
Mainz v Hamburg
Werder Bremen v Stuttgart

MAY 7, 2016

Bor Mon'gladbach v Bayer Leverkusen
Cologne v Werder Bremen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia Dortmund
Hamburg v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Darmstadt
Ingolstadt v Bayern Munich
Schalke v Augsburg
Stuttgart v Mainz

MAY 14, 2016

Augsburg v Hamburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Ingolstadt
Bayern Munich v Hanover
Borussia Dortmund v Cologne
Darmstadt v Bor Mon'gladbach
Mainz v Hertha Berlin
Hoffenheim v Schalke
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Stuttgart

(All dates subject to change)

Economic crisis bites as clubs struggle for signings

As Greece tries to find a way out of its financial doldrums, Superleague officials have expressed optimism that they will be able to survive this coming season following the turmoil of the previous campaign.

"We love soccer," says Superleague president Giorgos Borovilos. "Our country faces many challenges and we have to do something positive for Greek soccer to progress, to give vent and new breath to the fans from their everyday problems in life. What we must all do is to find solutions."

That, however, will be easier said than done as Greece was almost kicked out of UEFA and FIFA after the government tried to get involved in the affairs of the Greek Football Federation, which itself is accused of being involved in a match-fixing scandal.

And if the domestic game was not in enough trouble already, the national team added to the misery by losing twice to the Faroe Islands in the Euro 2016 qualifiers.

"We all want the best championship; more competitive and with no incidents of violence," adds Borovilos, who took over at the helm of the federation after previous incumbent Giorgos Sarris and other officials faced felony charges for alleged involvement in the establishment of a criminal gang which fixed Greek matches.

With individual budgets as tight as ever, there were few significant new signings during the summer as clubs looked to avoid the financial failure which forced two Superleague clubs – OFI and Olympiakos Volos – to drop out of the league before the end of last season due to a lack of funds.

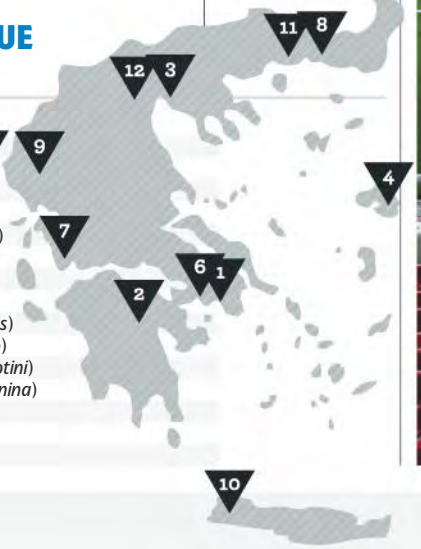
Another reason for the lack of new signings is that, because of the continuous speculation that Greece will default on its debt, foreign players in the country are extremely concerned about their euro-related contracts. Agents are desperately trying to renegotiate deals to secure their clients' wages in case of a devaluation of the currency. Many are also asking for wages to be deposited in accounts abroad, rather than in Greece.

KEY DATES
The regular season starts on August 22 and will finish on April 16, followed by European play-off games.

Key early matches include Olympiakos v AEK (Oct 17) and Panathinaikos v AEK (Oct 31).

Back...AEK were promoted at the end of last term

GREEK SUPERLEAGUE 2015-16



1 AEK (*Athens*)
Atromitos
Panathinaikos
Panionios
2 Asteras Tripoli
3 Iraklis (*Thessaloniki*)
PAOK
4 Kalloni (*Mytilene*)
5 Kerkyra (*Corfu*)
6 Olympiakos (*Piraeus*)
7 Panetolikos (*Agrinio*)
8 Panthrakikos (*Komotini*)
9 PAS Giannina (*Ioannina*)
10 Platanias (*Chania*)
11 Skoda Xanthi
12 Veria

However, Olympiakos' Spanish goalkeeepr Roberto has a different view, saying: "Any player who wants to come and play in Greece should do so. Soccer has not been affected by the financial crisis here.

"At Olympiakos, they are consistent with payments. Yes, the country has problems but we continue to play soccer."

Olympiakos' managing director Ioannis Vrentzos believes that even minor clubs in England have more revenue from commercial sponsors than all of those in Greece put together.

"Olympiakos try to bring in great players, but the taxation here is high and gives no incentives or benefits to players," he says. "It is over 50 per cent and takes away much of our budget. Five years ago it was only 20 per cent.

"In the last few years we have given €90million in taxes. Let's see what the other clubs have given – the authorities should be careful with this."

Disgrace...Greece (in blue) lost twice to the Faroe Islands in the Euro qualifiers

Olympiakos, who have slashed season-ticket prices in half for this season, are one of the few Greek clubs to make a profit – and this is due to constant Champions League football. But while they may not have trouble paying their players, others are not as fortunate.

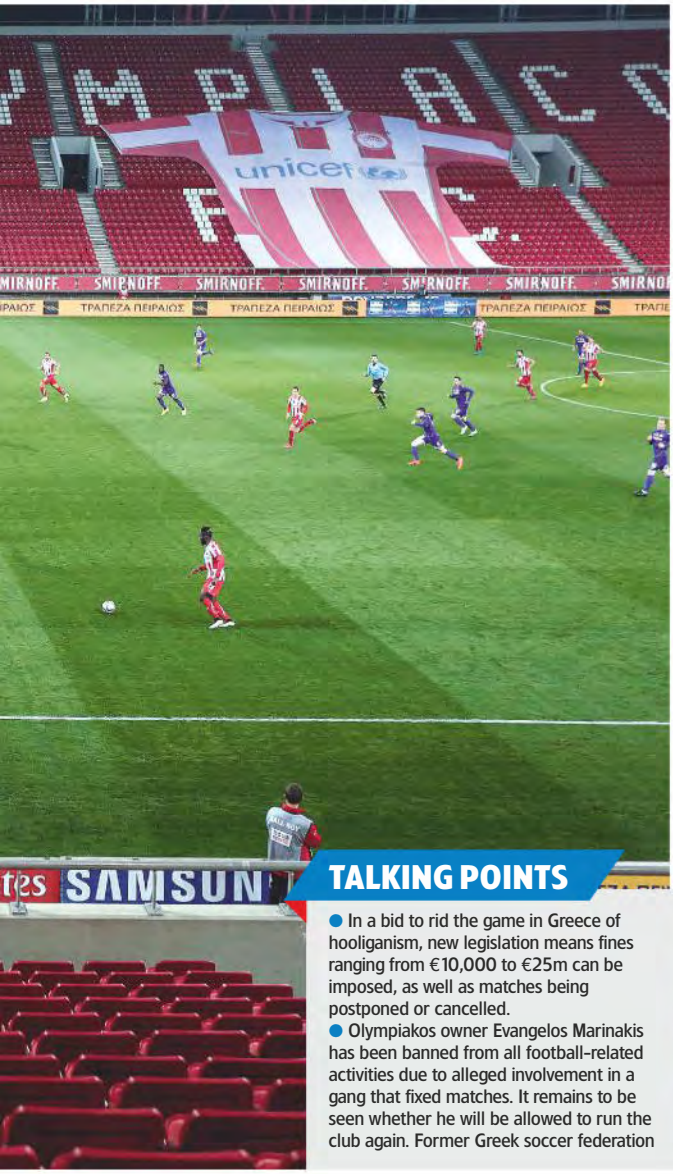
"Some clubs here are not serious in their payments and now with the crisis the situation has worsened," says PAS Giannina's Spanish midfielder Noe Acosta. "Giannina are trying to be more consistent in their payments as best they can."

> "Our country faces many challenges and we have to do something positive for Greek soccer to progress"
>
> **Superleague president Giorgos Borovilos**

Yet in spite of such problems, English goalkeeper Luke Steele has extended his contract with Panathinaikos until the summer of 2018.

"My friends see the bad pictures and think I live in a Third World country," says Steele. "But it is incredible, awesome and a beautiful country."

Lou Economopoulos



Worries...Olympiakos and Skoda Xanthi play at an empty Karaiskaki stadium in Piraeus

TALKING POINTS

- In a bid to rid the game in Greece of hooliganism, new legislation means fines ranging from €10,000 to €25m can be imposed, as well as matches being postponed or cancelled.
- Olympiakos owner Evangelos Marinakis has been banned from all football-related activities due to alleged involvement in a gang that fixed matches. It remains to be seen whether he will be allowed to run the club again. Former Greek soccer federation president Giorgos Sarris faces similar charges and is barred from leaving the country.
- Former Panathinaikos striker Djibril Cisse has agreed to settle a tax debt to the Greek state through a new measure allowing the Frenchman to pay in 100 installments. He owes more than €300,000 from his time with the club, between 2009 and 2011. Cisse was under the impression that Panathinaikos had taken care of his tax obligations, but the club said no such clause was in his contract.

Debt...Cisse must pay the tax he owes

ONES TO WATCH

RAFIK DJEBBOUR *(AEK)*
The 31-year-old striker returned to promoted AEK and said: "My goal is to win a league title with AEK and return to the Champions League."

MICHAEL ESSIEN *(Panathinaikos)*
The 32-year-old Ghana midfielder will be playing in his fifth different European league championship after joining the Athens club.

STEFANOS KAPINO *(Olympiakos)*
The ex-Panathinaikos keeper joined the champions after playing just twice for German club Mainz last term.

APOSTOLOS VELLIOS *(Iraklis)*
After spells in Denmark, Belgium and England, the former under-21 striker has returned to promoted Iraklis.

ALAN PULIDO *(Olympiakos)*
The Mexican striker hopes to concentrate on playing now that the legal battle over his contract with former club Tigres has been resolved.

Yet another hunt to replace departing stars

It happens every year, and this summer was no exception. Dutch clubs lost the battle with their counterparts from Europe's biggest leagues as the country's brightest talents move abroad.

And it doesn't matter that some of those youngsters, such as 21-year-old defender Wesley Hoedt – who traded AZ for Lazio in Italy – have only a few Eredivisie games under their belts.

This summer, Premier League clubs across the North Sea were the biggest buyers – although they tended to be far more interested in players with international experience.

Memphis Depay opened the transfer window with his £25million move from PSV to Manchester United, and it was just a matter of time before team-mate

On parade...Feyenoord's pre-season "open day"

Giorginio Wijnaldum headed in the same direction, joining Newcastle United – who have a big Dutch colony – for £14.4m.

Both players had committed themselves to the Eindhoven club after the 2014 World Cup finals, but after breaking the Ajax monopoly last term it was always likely they would move on.

Another international heading to England was Feyenoord midfielder Jordy Clasie, reunited at Southampton with his former coach Ronald Koeman – who also snapped up Twente defender Cuco Martina. Andreas Bjelland, who played alongside Martina last season, joined Championship side Brentford and Heerenveen goalkeeper Kristoffer Nordfeldt went to Swansea City.

Burkina Faso international Bertrand Traore also left, but the striker was only on loan at Vitesse and Chelsea chose not to release him again.

While these departures will leave a gap, there will be others who will get

Champion trio...PSV new boys (from left) Pereiro, Lestienne and Propper

DUTCH EREDIVISIE 2015-16

1 Ajax *(Amsterdam)*
2 AZ *(Alkmaar)*
3 Cambuur *(Leeuwarden)*
4 De Graafschap *(Doetinchem)*
5 Den Haag *(The Hague)*
6 Excelsior *(Rotterdam)*
Feyenoord
7 Groningen
8 Heerenveen
9 Heracles *(Almelo)*
10 NEC *(Breda)*
11 PEC *(Zwolle)*
12 PSV *(Eindhoven)*
13 Roda *(Kerkrade)*
14 Twente *(Enschede)*
15 Utrecht
16 Vitesse (Arnhem)
17 Willem II (Tilburg)

PROMOTED TEAMS

NEC
Second Division champions who returned to the highest level after one year by picking up a record 101 points.

DE GRAAFSCHAP
Surprising promotion after winning the play-offs. Finished sixth in the league.

RODA
After last year's relegation they looked doomed for a long spell in the second tier due to financial worries, but they won promotion by beating NAC in the play-offs.

NEW COACHES

ERNEST FABER *(NEC)*
Former PSV player and assistant last season to Philip Cocu in Eindhoven. He'll be coaching a top-level club for the first time.

ERIK TEN HAG *(Utrecht)*
Former defender who led Go Ahead Eagles to promotion two years ago. before coaching Bayern Munich's reserves.

ALFONS GROENENDIJK *(Excelsior)*
A member of Ajax's 1992 UEFA Cup winners and later technical director of Romanian club Universitatea Cluj.

DARIJE KALEZIC *(Roda)*
Swiss-born former Bosnia defender who has coached De Graafschap, Zulte Waregem and PSV reserves.

GIOVANNI VAN BRONCKHORST *(Feyenoord)*
Will he be as successful as his former national team colleagues Frank De Boer (Ajax) and Phillip Cocu (PSV) at the start of his coaching career? Took over from Fred Rutten at the start of the play-offs.

their chance – at least, that is what has happened in previous years when the exodus has been just as intense.

Those hoping to benefit include Davy Propper, who has joined PSV from Vitesse. It will be interesting to see if the one-time international can be the same technically gifted playmaker at a higher level. And will his former team-mate Marko Vejinovic be able to handle the pressure of the ever-demanding Feyenoord fans?

Yaya Sanogo, the French striker hired from Arsenal, will try to break the curse of players on loan at Ajax, with the likes of Barcelona's Bojan Krkic and Isaac Cuenca among those who have failed to make their mark in Amsterdam in the past.

From Heerenveen's Sam Larsson to Twente's Hakim Ziyech and Groningen's Albert Rusnak, there are plenty of exciting talents set to further their footballing education this term.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are two returning veterans, with Johnny Heitinga and Dirk Kuyt deciding to spend the final years of their careers at Ajax and Feyenoord respectively. They will be expected to take their rawer team-mates by the hand and help prepare them for the future, while also providing a sounding board for their coaches.

Success, however, can depend on many things. For instance, after a frustrating time at Hertha Berlin, Heitinga will need to convince those around him that he still warrants a starting place. Kuyt will probably need less effort to gain respect, but the pressure at the Rotterdam club is enormous following a trophyless season in which even a European place was out of reach.

It is difficult, however, to look outside Holland's top three clubs as Eredivisie championship contenders.

Last year's winners PSV look to have bought well after the departure of Depay, Wijnaldum and Oscar Hiljemark (Palermo), with left-back Simon Poulsen (AZ) and midfielders Gaston Pereiro (Nacional) and Maxime Lestienne (Al Arabi) joining fellow newcomer Propper.

After finishing empty-handed for the first time in five years, Ajax coach Frank De Boer has made some drastic changes. Niklas Moisander (Sampdoria), Kolbeinn Sigthorsson (Nantes) and Richairo Zivkovic (Willem II, on loan) were offloaded but it remains to be seen whether Heitinga, Sanogo, left-back Mitchell Dijks – who was bought from Willem II but came up through the Ajax youth ranks before being labelled not good enough and sold – and winger Amir Younes (Borussia Monchengladbach) are a real quality injection. At least, in Nemanja Gudelj (AZ) the Amsterdam club have finally signed a decent ball-winning midfielder.

As for Feyenoord, much will depend on Kuyt's form, fitness and charisma, while Giovanni Van Bronckhorst can't make too many mistakes in his first coaching job if they don't want to end up potless again.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Selfie...Ajax signing Nemanja Gudelj poses with a young fan

Silverware...Albert Rusnak celebrates a goal for Groningen in last season's Dutch Cup Final

TALKING POINTS

- Twente fans demanded the removal of coach Alfred Schreuder last season, but the cash-strapped club had no money to pay off his contract, which expires in 2019. A couple of bad results early on and the situation will be untenable.
- PEC Zwolle and Groningen were cup winners for the past two seasons. As the gap between the top clubs and the rest gets smaller every year, will another supposed minnow get their name on the trophy?
- Even if Ajax and PSV slip up in the title race, can anyone take advantage? Much will depend on the strength of the AZ and Vitesse squads, but as they sell their best players every season it looks unlikely.
- For the last four years, Ajax have failed to get beyond the group stage of the Champions League. PSV don't look to have any better chance of progressing – unless the draw is kind to them.
- With the departure of Nemanja Gudelj, Esteban Alvarado, Simon Poulsen and Wesley Hoedt, AZ hope to follow Midtjylland's success in Denmark with their "Moneyball" approach.
- The three promoted clubs all went down last year, but with budgets making little difference at the bottom, any three of nine clubs could be battling the drop.

Pressure... Twente's Schreuder

ONES TO WATCH

SVEN VAN BEEK *(Feyenoord)*
A steady central defender who is a good passer of the ball. The national team doesn't seem too far away.

DAVY KLAASSEN *(Ajax)*
Utility player who will get a more attacking midfield role since the arrival of Nemanja Gudelj. It's where he plays best.

DIRK KUYT *(Feyenoord)*
The prodigal son returns and fans have high hopes of the 35-year-old whose never-say-die attitude fits well at De Kuip.

ANDRES GUARDADO *(PSV)*
Last year's best player in the league, his experience and ability will be vital in the silverware race.

SAM LARSSON *(Heerenveen)*
Nicknamed "Samba Sam" for his dribbling, the Swedish winger could be the next big export if he remains injury free.

HAKIM ZIYECH *(Twente)*
One of the most technically gifted players and free-kick specialist. How long can Twente hang on to him?

DAVY PROPPER *(PSV)*
Midfield maestro and a super passer but will he have the charisma to play a leading part for the champions?

FIXTURES

AUGUST 7, 2015
Heerenveen v De Graafschap

AUGUST 8, 2015
Den Haag v PSV
Feyenoord v Utrecht
PEC Zwolle v Cambuur
Roda JC v Heracles

AUGUST 9, 2015
AZ v Ajax
Groningen v Twente
NEC v Excelsior
Willem II v Vitesse

AUGUST 14, 2015
Vitesse v Roda JC

AUGUST 15, 2015
Ajax v Willem II
De Graafschap v PEC Zwolle
Excelsior v AZ
Twente v Den Haag

AUGUST 16, 2015
Cambuur v Feyenoord
Heracles v NEC
PSV v Groningen
Utrecht v Heerenveen

AUGUST 21, 2015
Groningen v Excelsior

AUGUST 22, 2015
Cambuur v Heracles
Heerenveen v PSV
NEC v Ajax
Roda JC v De Graafschap

AUGUST 23, 2015
AZ v Willem II
Den Haag v Utrecht
Feyenoord v Vitesse
PEC Zwolle v Twente

AUGUST 28, 2015
Willem II v NEC

AUGUST 29, 2015
Excelsior v De Graafschap
Heerenveen v PEC Zwolle
Heracles v Twente
Utrecht v Groningen

SUNDAY 30TH AUGUST 2015
Ajax v Den Haag
AZ v Roda JC
PSV v Feyenoord
Vitesse v Cambuur

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015
Cambuur v PSV
De Graafschap v AZ
PEC Zwolle v Excelsior
Roda JC v NEC
Twente v Ajax

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015
Den Haag v Heracles
Feyenoord v Willem II
Groningen v Heerenveen
Utrecht v Vitesse

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015
NEC v Heerenveen

SEPTEMBER 19, 2015
Cambuur v Twente
Heracles v PSV
PEC Zwolle v Den Haag
Willem II v Utrecht

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015
Excelsior v Ajax
Groningen v AZ
Roda JC v Feyenoord
Vitesse v De Graafschap

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015
Ajax v Groningen
AZ v Heracles
Heerenveen v Vitesse
PSV v NEC
Utrecht v Cambuur

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015
De Graafschap v Willem II
Den Haag v Excelsior
Feyenoord v PEC Zwolle
Twente v Roda JC

OCTOBER 2, 2015
Heracles v Heerenveen

OCTOBER 3, 2015
Excelsior v Utrecht
NEC v Den Haag
Roda JC v Cambuur
Willem II v PEC Zwolle

OCTOBER 4, 2015
Ajax v PSV
De Graafschap v Feyenoord
AZ v Twente
Vitesse v Groningen

OCTOBER 17, 2015
Cambuur v AZ
Groningen v Willem II
Heracles v Ajax
PSV v Excelsior
Utrecht v Roda JC

OCTOBER 18, 2015
Den Haag v De Graafschap
Heerenveen v Feyenoord
PEC Zwolle v Vitesse
Twente v NEC

OCTOBER 23, 2015
PEC Zwolle v Utrecht

OCTOBER 24, 2015
De Graafschap v Heracles
Roda JC v Excelsior
Twente v PSV
Willem II v Heerenveen

OCTOBER 25, 2015
Cambuur v Den Haag
Feyenoord v AZ
NEC v Groningen
Vitesse v Ajax

OCTOBER 30, 2015
Heracles v Willem II

OCTOBER 31, 2015
Ajax v Roda JC
De Graafschap v PSV
Excelsior v Vitesse
Groningen v PEC Zwolle

NOVEMBER 1, 2015
AZ v NEC
Den Haag v Feyenoord
Heerenveen v Cambuur
Utrecht v Twente

NOVEMBER 6, 2015
Roda JC v Den Haag

NOVEMBER 7, 2015
NEC v De Graafschap
PEC Zwolle v Heracles
Twente v Heerenveen
Willem II v Excelsior

NOVEMBER 8, 2015
Cambuur v Groningen
Feyenoord v Ajax
PSV v Utrecht
Vitesse v AZ

NOVEMBER 21, 2015
Ajax v Cambuur
AZ v Heerenveen
De Graafschap v Groningen
Roda JC v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v PSV

NOVEMBER 22, 2015
Den Haag v Vitesse
Feyenoord v Twente
Heracles v Excelsior
NEC v Utrecht

NOVEMBER 27, 2015
Cambuur v De Graafschap

NOVEMBER 28, 2015
Excelsior v Feyenoord
Heerenveen v Roda JC
Twente v Willem II

NOVEMBER 29, 2015
Groningen v Den Haag
PEC Zwolle v Ajax
PSV v AZ
Utrecht v Heracles
Vitesse v NEC

DECEMBER 4, 2015
AZ v Den Haag

DECEMBER 5, 2015
Ajax v Heerenveen
De Graafschap v Utrecht
Excelsior v Twente
Vitesse v PSV

DECEMBER 6, 2015
Feyenoord v Heracles
NEC v PEC Zwolle
Roda JC v Groningen
Willem II v Cambuur

DECEMBER 11, 2015
Heerenveen v Excelsior

DECEMBER 12, 2015
Cambuur v NEC
Den Haag v Willem II
PSV v Roda JC
Twente v De Graafschap

DECEMBER 13, 2015
Groningen v Feyenoord
Heracles v Vitesse
PEC Zwolle v AZ
Utrecht v Ajax

DECEMBER 18, 2015
Vitesse v Twente

DECEMBER 19, 2015
AZ v Utrecht
Heracles v Groningen
PSV v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v Roda JC

DECEMBER 20, 2015
Ajax v De Graafschap
Excelsior v Cambuur
Heerenveen v Den Haag
NEC v Feyenoord

JANUARY 15, 2016
Twente v Heracles

JANUARY 16, 2016
Cambuur v Vitesse
De Graafschap v Excelsior
PEC Zwolle v Heerenveen
Roda JC v AZ

JANUARY 17, 2016
Den Haag v Ajax
Feyenoord v PSV
Groningen v Utrecht
NEC v Willem II

JANUARY 22, 2016
Groningen v NEC

JANUARY 23, 2016
Ajax v Vitesse
Excelsior v Roda JC
Heerenveen v Willem II
Heracles v De Graafschap

JANUARY 24, 2016
AZ v Feyenoord
Den Haag v Cambuur
PSV v Twente
Utrecht v PEC Zwolle

JANUARY 26, 2016
Ajax v Heracles
Willem II v Groningen

JANUARY 27, 2016
AZ v Cambuur
De Graafschap v Den Haag
Excelsior v PSV
NEC v Twente
Vitesse v PEC Zwolle

JANUARY 28, 2016
Roda JC v Utrecht
Feyenoord v Heerenveen

JANUARY 29, 2016
Willem II v Heracles

JANUARY 30, 2016
NEC v AZ
PEC Zwolle v Groningen
PSV v De Graafschap
Vitesse v Excelsior

JANUARY 31, 2016
Cambuur v Heerenveen
Feyenoord v Den Haag
Roda JC v Ajax
Twente v Utrecht

FEBRUARY 5, 2016
Excelsior v Willem II

FEBRUARY 6, 2016
AZ v Vitesse
Den Haag v Roda JC
Heerenveen v Twente
Heracles v PEC Zwolle

FEBRUARY 7, 2016
Ajax v Feyenoord
De Graafschap v NEC
Groningen v Cambuur
Utrecht v PSV

FEBRUARY 12, 2016
Cambuur v Utrecht

FEBRUARY 13, 2016
Heracles v AZ
Roda JC v Twente
Vitesse v Heerenveen
Willem II v De Graafschap

FEBRUARY 14, 2016
Groningen v Ajax
Excelsior v Den Haag
PEC Zwolle v Feyenoord
NEC v PSV

FEBRUARY 19, 2016
Den Haag v PEC Zwolle

FEBRUARY 20, 2016
AZ v Groningen
Heerenveen v NEC
PSV v Heracles
Twente v Cambuur

FEBRUARY 21, 2016
Ajax v Excelsior
De Graafschap v Vitesse
Feyenoord v Roda JC
Utrecht v Willem II

FEBRUARY 26, 2016
Excelsior v NEC

FEBRUARY 27, 2016
Cambuur v PEC Zwolle
PSV v Den Haag
Twente v Groningen
Vitesse v Willem II

FEBRUARY 28, 2016
Ajax v AZ
De Graafschap v Heerenveen
Heracles v Roda JC
Utrecht v Feyenoord

MARCH 4, 2016
Den Haag v Twente

MARCH 5, 2016
AZ v Excelsior
Groningen v PSV
Heerenveen v Utrecht
PEC Zwolle v De Graafschap

MARCH 6, 2016
Feyenoord v Cambuur
NEC v Heracles
Roda JC v Vitesse
Willem II v Ajax

MARCH 11, 2016
De Graafschap v Roda JC

MARCH 12, 2016
Excelsior v Groningen
PSV v Heerenveen
Twente v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v AZ

MARCH 13, 2016
Ajax v NEC
Heracles v Cambuur
Utrecht v Den Haag
Vitesse v Feyenoord

MARCH 18, 2016
Utrecht v Excelsior

MARCH 19, 2016
Cambuur v Roda JC
Feyenoord v De Graafschap
Heerenveen v Heracles
PEC Zwolle v Willem II

MARCH 20, 2016
Den Haag v NEC
Groningen v Vitesse
PSV v Ajax
Twente v AZ

APRIL 2, 2016
AZ v PSV
De Graafschap v Cambuur
Feyenoord v Excelsior
Heracles v Utrecht
Willem II v Twente

APRIL 3, 2016
Ajax v PEC Zwolle
Den Haag v Groningen
NEC v Vitesse
Roda JC v Heerenveen

APRIL 8, 2016
PEC Zwolle v Roda JC

APRIL 9, 2016
Cambuur v Ajax
Excelsior v Heracles
PSV v Willem II
Vitesse v Den Haag

APRIL 10, 2016
Groningen v De Graafschap
Heerenveen v AZ
Twente v Feyenoord
Utrecht v NEC

APRIL 15, 2016
De Graafschap v Twente

APRIL 16, 2016
AZ v PEC Zwolle
Feyenoord v Groningen
Roda JC v PSV
Vitesse v Heracles

APRIL 17, 2016
Ajax v Utrecht
Excelsior v Heerenveen
NEC v Cambuur
Willem II v Den Haag

APRIL 19, 2016
Groningen v Roda JC
PSV v Vitesse

APRIL 20, 2016
Den Haag v AZ
Heerenveen v Ajax
PEC Zwolle v NEC
Twente v Excelsior
Utrecht v De Graafschap

APRIL 21, 2016
Cambuur v Willem II
Heracles v Feyenoord

MAY 1, 2016
Ajax v Twente
AZ v De Graafschap
Excelsior v PEC Zwolle
Heerenveen v Groningen
Heracles v Den Haag
NEC v Roda JC
PSV v Cambuur
Vitesse v Utrecht
Willem II v Feyenoord

MAY 8, 2016
Cambuur v Excelsior
Den Haag v Heerenveen
De Graafschap v Ajax
Groningen v Heracles
Feyenoord v NEC
PEC Zwolle v PSV
Roda JC v Willem II
Twente v Vitesse
Utrecht v AZ

(All dates subject to change)

Two faces of Italian football

A splendid Juventus in last season's Champions League Final or the squalor of Parma in the bankruptcy court: which of these is the most representative face of Italian football?

As the curtain rises on another Serie A campaign, it is obvious that the game continues to reflect the highs and lows of the mesmerising society in which it is played. Modern Italy, after all, moves easily from the beauty of a Ferrari to the disgrace of widespread organised crime.

Not for nothing, two days after the 3-1 Champions League Final loss to Barcelona, Juve president Andrea Agnelli very publicly stated that the good showings in Europe by his club during the season, and by Fiorentina and Napoli in the Europa League, owed little to *"sistema Italia"* but rather everything to the good work of the three clubs involved.

On the eve of this new campaign, Italian football offers a now almost-traditional schizophrenic vision.

On the one hand, we have a movement of the highest standards, reflected not only by the quality of football played by such as Juventus, but also by the international demand for Italian know-how exemplified by coaches such as Carlo Ancelotti, Fabio Capello, Marcello Lippi, Roberto Mancini and, even at the ripe old age of 76, by Giovanni Trapattoni.

On the other hand, we have an Italian game humiliated not only by the ignominy of the Parma collapse but also by a seemingly unending series of match-fixing scandals, often related to both international betting syndicates and to organised crime. Yet again, the football federation's prosecutor, Stefano Palazzi, will be working overtime to deal with the implications of May's "Catanzaro" enquiry, which involves mainly Lega Pro teams, and the Catania enquiry in June, involving essentially the club's then-owner Antonino Pulvirenti.

In both cases, Palazzi has to work quickly so that eventual federation disciplinary proceedings (enforced relegations/promotions) are resolved in time for the compilation of the new Serie B and Lega Pro fixture lists. While Serie A is scheduled to begin on the weekend of August 22/23, the Serie B and Lega Pro seasonal starts have been delayed until September 5/6 because of these enquiries.

If recent scandals in Italian football have involved huge gambling heists, the most recent Catania one is almost endearingly old fashioned by comparison. Owner Pulvirenti claims he set about fixing end-of-season games not to make millions by betting but to ensure that his side avoided relegation to Lega Pro.

In contrast, the "Catanzaro" investigation, which saw 50 people arrested last May, ▸

Naming names...prosecutor Di Martino (right) faces the media over his match-fixing enquiry

Euro campaign...Napoli's Lorenzo Insigne (left)

ITALIAN SERIE A 2015-16

1 Atalanta *(Bergamo)*
2 Bologna
3 Carpi
4 Chievo *(Verona)*
Verona
5 Empoli
6 Fiorentina *(Florence)*
7 Frosinone
8 Genoa *(Genoa)*
Sampdoria
9 Internazionale *(Milan)*
Milan
10 Juventus *(Turin)*
Torino
11 Lazio *(Rome)*
Roma
12 Napoli *(Naples)*
13 Palermo
14 Sassuolo
15 Udinese *(Udine)*

Gone...Juventus must do without (from top) Vidal, Tevez and Pirlo this season

PROMOTED TEAMS

BOLOGNA
With experienced ex-Lazio coach Delio Rossi at the helm, they won a last-gasp, hard-fought promotion against Pescara in the play-offs. Back in Serie A after just one season, Bologna will surprise no one if they avoid the drop.

CARPI & FROSINONE
Last winter, Lazio president Claudio Lotito was recorded in a phone call saying that sides such as Carpi and Frosinone "aren't worth a damn" and if such sides were promoted to Serie A they would devalue its TV rights package. Fortunately, it looks like the sporting gods have had the last laugh. However, it will require all their help if either is to avoid relegation.

NEW COACHES

PAULO SOUSA
(Fiorentina)
The 44-year-old former Juventus midfielder has coached Portugal, QPR, Swansea City, Leicester City and Basle.

MAURIZIO SARRI
(Napoli)
Owes this huge chance to a fine season with Empoli, who finished eight points clear of relegation.

SINISA MIHAJLOVIC
(Milan)
Two fine seasons at Sampdoria underlined good spells with Catania, Fiorentina and Serbia.

WALTER ZENGA
(Sampdoria)
The former Inter and Italy keeper has an impressive, 17-year coaching CV, including spells in Romania, Serbia and Dubai.

STEFANO COLANTUONO
(Udinese)
Implicated in the "Last Bet" match-fixing investigation over the Atalanta versus Crotone game in 2011.

MARCO GIAMPAOLO
(Empoli)
Faces a tough task now that Empoli have sold Mirko Valdifiori (Napoli) and Daniele Rugani (Juventus).

bears the depressingly familiar look of a scandal in which online betting syndicates, local mafiosi and under-paid lower-division footballers form an explosive cocktail.

As well as these investigations, Italian football is still haunted by the Cremona-based, 2011-initiated "Last Bet" match-fixing investigation, run by local prosecutor Roberto Di Martino and allegedly involving betting syndicates in the Balkans, the Far East and Italy. In early July, Di Martino indicated the scope of his enquiry when he requested that 104 people be summoned to stand trial in relation to at least 60 suspect games – including a handful of Serie A fixtures.

Among those named were football royalty, including current national coach Antonio Conte, ex-Lazio striker Beppe Signori, current Lazio captain Stefano Mauri, former Italy international Christian Doni and Udinese coach Stefano Colantuono. Given Italy's liberal use of the "Statute Of Limitations" clause, this trial may never arrive at sentencing but, in the meantime, it is guaranteed to cause a huge media fuss.

That certainly applies to Conte who, essentially, is charged with not having reported a typical, last day of the season Serie B relegation/promotion "fix" between Albinoleffe and Siena, the team he was then coaching. The story of this game, played in May 2011, is quickly told: Albinoleffe, threatened with relegation, needed the points while Siena, already sure of promotion to Serie A, did not.

Conte is accused of having known that there was an "agreement" between the Albinoleffe and Siena players to ensure that Albinoleffe won the game. The prosecutor argues that Conte should have "safeguarded the players' moral conduct", implying that he knew about the fix but chose not to intervene.

Given the snail-like pace of Italian justice, the trial may not begin until the end of the year or later, making it possible that Conte could find himself on trial right up to the eve of the European Championship in France next summer. Understandably, this is something which Conte would dearly like to avoid even if the football federation do not seem worried with president Carlo Tavecchio repeating that "Conte is innocent until he has been definitively condemned".

What makes for remarkable reading, however, is a recent interview given to sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport* by prosecutor Di Martino. In it, he suggests that the football federation and other sports authorities were not exactly enamoured of his enquiry, saying: "What is sure is that none of them ever came to my office, looking for detailed information."

Di Martino goes on to say footballers have a "wrong attitude" that is ground into them from their youth-team days, adding: "Players are often convinced that they have done nothing wrong and the last thing in the world that they expect is to end up in prison. Seventeen players, including Mauri and ex-Genoa midfielder Omar Milanetto, ended up serving jail time in the summer of 2012.

"They think that a mutually convenient agreement between two teams is normal. But it is not. On the contrary, it is a penal and sports felony."

Di Martino also sounds a dire note of warning for the highest level of the game, saying: "At the beginning of the investigation, I thought that the problem concerned only the Lega Pro. I was wrong. It is just as easy to fix a Serie A game, and if you look at the court documents you will find plenty of examples of this."

All of that is for the future. As for the football out on the pitch rather than the courtroom, it inevitably still revolves around champions Juventus. Having lost the Champions League Final, Juve have opted to release three key figures of recent years: Andrea Pirlo (New York City), Carlos Tevez (Boca Juniors) and Arturo Vidal (Bayern Munich).

If there was something inevitable about the departures of 36-year-old Pirlo for the USA and 31-year-old Tevez for his native Argentina, the same does not apply to midfield dynamo Vidal. Whereas the first two might have come to the end of their Juventus road, you could argue that Chile's Vidal would still make an important contribution to the cause.

"Juventus are probably favourites again, and the team to beat because we're the strongest, but this year's championship will be more balanced"

Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri

However, it would seem that the folk in Turin have opted to make a new start, replacing the above with players such as Argentinian striker Paulo Dybala (Palermo), Croat striker Mario Mandzukic (Atletico Madrid), Sami Khedira (Real Madrid) and Simone Zaza (Sassuolo). When he met the media on the first day of pre-season training, coach Massimiliano Allegri made plenty of positive noises, saying: "I am very happy with the team that we have put together.

"You cannot remain hooked on great players when they opt to follow another path. This year's Champions League Final must not be an exception, it has to become the rule that we end up among the top eight in Europe.

"Juventus are probably favourites again and the team to beat because we're the strongest. but this year's championship will be more balanced.

"The two Milan clubs and Roma have reinforced themselves and I think they will make a fight of it this year."

Paddy Agnew

TALKING POINTS

- With Thohir at Internazionale, Pallotta at Roma and Bee Taechaubol at Milan, the foreign influence in Serie A is growing. The future of top-level Italian football perhaps depends on the success of these men in reshaping the destinies of three of the country's most prestigious clubs.
- Roberto Mancini recently suggested his decision to return to Inter last November, after a six-year absence, was an act of folly. But with the help of Thohir-generated funds, there may yet be method in his madness.
- Sinisa Mihajlovic's two seasons in charge of Sampdoria suggest he could become a great coach. Is he the man to put Milan back on top?
- Francesco Totti will be 39 in September. Have we got to the moment when Roma need to tell their football ambassador extraordinaire that the time has finally come to hang up his boots?
- In charge of Parma's under-19 side last season, how will former Argentina striker Hernan Crespo make out in his first senior team coaching role, at Modena in Serie B?
- Roberto Donadoni's reputation emerged enhanced from last season's traumatic year with liquidated Parma as they picked up

On the mend... Giuseppe Rossi (left) is back for Fiorentina

City rivals...Milan's new signing Luiz Adriano is tackled by Fredy Guarin of Internazionale

ONES TO WATCH

GONZALO HIGUAIN *(Napoli)*
Has a point to prove after penalty misses in the World Cup Final, Copa America Final and Napoli's 4-2 defeat by Lazio in the European decider.

SIMONE ZAZA *(Juventus)*
As Juve seek to replace Tevez, in come Mandzukic and Dyabala. But Zaza may yet prove the best buy, at €18m from Sassuolo.

MATEO KOVACIC *(Internazionale)*
Now in his third season at Inter, the Croat is an inspirational schemer. Will he realise his undoubted talent this year under Mancini?

FELIPE ANDERSON *(Lazio)*
Lazio were expected to cash in on the Brazilian after an outstanding season. The question now is can he repeat last term's heroics?

MIRKO VALDIFIORI *(Napoli)*
New coach Maurizio Sarri will clearly look to the playmaker, who was a key figure in his Empoli side of last season, to restore the glory days at Napoli.

MANOLO GABBIADINI *(Napoli)*
Joined from Sampdoria last January and the impression remains that his best is yet to come.

PEPE REINA *(Napoli)*
Back after a year as reserve to Manuel Neuer at Bayern Munich, the keeper may help solidify a not always granite-like Napoli defence.

CARLOS BACCA *(Milan)*
Bought from Europa League winners Sevilla for €30m, the Colombian could be a key figure in the much-hoped for renaissance.

GEOFFREY KONDOGBIA *(Internazionale)*
Inter wanted the €30m-rated Monaco midielder so badly that they took him at the last minute from city rivals Milan.

points in seven of their last 10 Serie A games, winning against Juventus and Palermo, and drawing with Inter, Empoli, Napoli, Verona and Sampdoria. How long before he finds himself a new club?

● After a season that began with current federation president Carlo Tavecchio calling African footballers "banana eaters", and ended with the amateur league president Felice Belloli suggesting that women's football was a matter for "a bunch of lesbians", is there any chance of senior figures in Italian football being less of an embarrassment this term?

Old hand...Roberto Mancini seeks an Inter revival

● Antonio Conte figures in two state judicial investigations relating to alleged match-fixing in his time as coach of Bari and Siena. He denies any wrongdoing and the matter needs to be resolved.

● Out in the cold at Liverpool, a return to Italian football for Mario Balotelli cannot be ruled out. But who, if anyone, would be willing to take a punt on him?

● Hit four times by a knee injury since October 2011, Giuseppe Rossi missed all of last season. Still only 28, his return to full fitness would be warmly welcomed, not just by Fiorentina fans.

Derby... Sampdoria (in blue) and Genoa

Promoted...Gaetano Letizia of Carpi (white) and Bologna's Franco Zuculini

FIXTURES

AUGUST 23, 2015

Empoli v Chievo
Fiorentina v Milan
Frosinone v Torino
Internazionale v Atalanta
Juventus v Udinese
Lazio v Bologna
Palermo v Genoa
Sampdoria v Carpi
Sassuolo v Napoli
Verona v Roma

AUGUST 30, 2015

Atalanta v Frosinone
Bologna v Sassuolo
Carpi v Internazionale
Chievo v Lazio
Genoa v Verona
Milan v Empoli
Napoli v Sampdoria
Roma v Juventus
Torino v Fiorentina
Udinese v Palermo

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Empoli v Napoli
Fiorentina v Genoa
Frosinone v Roma
Internazionale v Milan
Juventus v Chievo
Lazio v Udinese
Palermo v Carpi
Sampdoria v Bologna
Sassuolo v Atalanta
Verona v Torino

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Atalanta v Verona
Bologna v Frosinone
Carpi v Fiorentina
Chievo v Internazionale
Genoa v Juventus
Milan v Palermo
Napoli v Lazio
Roma v Sassuolo
Torino v Sampdoria
Udinese v Empoli

SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

Carpi v Napoli
Chievo v Torino
Empoli v Atalanta
Fiorentina v Bologna
Internazionale v Verona
Juventus v Frosinone
Lazio v Genoa
Palermo v Sassuolo
Sampdoria v Roma
Udinese v Milan

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Atalanta v Sampdoria
Bologna v Udinese
Frosinone v Empoli
Genoa v Milan
Internazionale v Fiorentina
Napoli v Juventus
Roma v Carpi
Sassuolo v Chievo
Torino v Palermo
Verona v Lazio

OCTOBER 4, 2015

Carpi v Torino
Chievo v Verona
Empoli v Sassuolo
Fiorentina v Atalanta
Juventus v Bologna
Lazio v Frosinone
Milan v Napoli
Palermo v Roma
Sampdoria v Internazionale
Udinese v Genoa

OCTOBER 18, 2015

Atalanta v Carpi
Bologna v Palermo
Frosinone v Sampdoria
Genoa v Chievo
Internazionale v Juventus
Napoli v Fiorentina
Roma v Empoli
Sassuolo v Lazio
Torino v Milan
Verona v Udinese

OCTOBER 25, 2015

Carpi v Bologna
Chievo v Napoli
Empoli v Genoa
Fiorentina v Roma
Juventus v Atalanta
Lazio v Torino
Milan v Sassuolo
Palermo v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Verona
Udinese v Frosinone

OCTOBER 28, 2015

Atalanta v Lazio
Bologna v Internazionale
Frosinone v Carpi
Milan v Chievo
Napoli v Palermo
Roma v Udinese
Sampdoria v Empoli
Sassuolo v Juventus
Torino v Genoa
Verona v Fiorentina

NOVEMBER 1, 2015

Bologna v Atalanta
Carpi v Verona
Chievo v Sampdoria
Fiorentina v Frosinone
Genoa v Napoli
Internazionale v Roma
Juventus v Torino
Lazio v Milan
Palermo v Empoli
Udinese v Sassuolo

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Empoli v Juventus
Frosinone v Genoa
Milan v Atalanta
Napoli v Udinese
Palermo v Chievo
Roma v Lazio
Sampdoria v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Carpi
Torino v Internazionale
Verona v Bologna

NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Atalanta v Torino
Bologna v Roma
Carpi v Chievo
Fiorentina v Empoli
Genoa v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Frosinone
Juventus v Milan
Lazio v Palermo
Udinese v Sampdoria
Verona v Napoli

NOVEMBER 29, 2015

Chievo v Udinese
Empoli v Lazio
Frosinone v Verona
Genoa v Carpi
Milan v Sampdoria
Napoli v Internazionale
Palermo v Juventus
Roma v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Fiorentina
Torino v Bologna

DECEMBER 6, 2015

Atalanta v Palermo
Bologna v Napoli
Carpi v Milan
Fiorentina v Udinese
Frosinone v Chievo
Internazionale v Genoa
Lazio v Juventus
Sampdoria v Sassuolo
Torino v Roma
Verona v Empoli

DECEMBER 13, 2015

Chievo v Atalanta
Empoli v Carpi
Genoa v Bologna
Juventus v Fiorentina
Lazio v Sampdoria
Milan v Verona
Napoli v Roma
Palermo v Frosinone
Sassuolo v Torino
Udinese v Internazionale

DECEMBER 20, 2015

Atalanta v Napoli
Bologna v Empoli
Carpi v Juventus
Fiorentina v Chievo
Frosinone v Milan
Internazionale v Lazio
Roma v Genoa
Sampdoria v Palermo
Torino v Udinese
Verona v Sassuolo

JANUARY 6, 2016

Chievo v Roma
Empoli v Internazionale
Genoa v Sampdoria
Juventus v Verona
Lazio v Carpi
Milan v Bologna
Napoli v Torino
Palermo v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Frosinone
Udinese v Atalanta

JANUARY 10, 2016

Atalanta v Genoa
Bologna v Chievo
Carpi v Udinese
Fiorentina v Lazio
Frosinone v Napoli
Internazionale v Sassuolo
Roma v Milan
Sampdoria v Juventus
Torino v Empoli
Verona v Palermo

Rivalry...players from Roma and Lazio (in blue) clash during the Rome derby

On the up...Fiorentina's Gonzalo Rodriguez

JANUARY 17, 2016

Atalanta v Internazionale
Bologna v Lazio
Carpi v Sampdoria
Chievo v Empoli
Genoa v Palermo
Milan v Fiorentina
Napoli v Sassuolo
Roma v Verona
Torino v Frosinone
Udinese v Juventus

JANUARY 24, 2016

Empoli v Milan
Fiorentina v Torino
Frosinone v Atalanta
Internazionale v Carpi
Juventus v Roma
Lazio v Chievo
Palermo v Udinese
Sampdoria v Napoli
Sassuolo v Bologna
Verona v Genoa

JANUARY 31, 2016

Atalanta v Sassuolo
Bologna v Sampdoria
Carpi v Palermo
Chievo v Juventus
Genoa v Fiorentina
Milan v Internazionale
Napoli v Empoli
Roma v Frosinone
Torino v Verona
Udinese v Lazio

FEBRUARY 3, 2016

Empoli v Udinese
Fiorentina v Carpi
Frosinone v Bologna
Internazio nale v Chievo
Juventus v Genoa
Lazio v Napoli
Palermo v Milan
Sampdoria v Torino
Sassuolo v Roma
Verona v Atalanta

FEBRUARY 7, 2016

Atalanta v Empoli
Bologna v Fiorentina
Frosinone v Juventus
Genoa v Lazio
Milan v Udinese
Napoli v Carpi
Roma v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Palermo
Torino v Chievo
Verona v Internazionale

FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Carpi v Roma
Chievo v Sassuolo
Empoli v Frosinone
Fiorentina v Internazionale
Juventus v Napoli
Lazio v Verona
Milan v Genoa
Palermo v Torino
Sampdoria v Atalanta
Udinese v Bologna

FEBRUARY 21, 2016

Atalanta v Fiorentina
Bologna v Juventus
Frosinone v Lazio
Genoa v Udinese
Internazionale v Sampdoria
Napoli v Milan
Roma v Palermo
Sassuolo v Empoli
Torino v Carpi
Verona v Chievo

FEBRUARY 28, 2016

Carpi v Atalanta
Chievo v Genoa
Empoli v Roma
Fiorentina v Napoli
Juventus v Internazionale
Lazio v Sassuolo
Milan v Torino
Palermo v Bologna
Sampdoria v Frosinone
Udinese v Verona

MARCH 6, 2016

Atalanta v Juventus
Bologna v Carpi
Frosinone v Udinese
Genoa v Empoli
Internazionale v Palermo
Napoli v Chievo
Roma v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Milan
Torino v Lazio
Verona v Sampdoria

MARCH 13, 2016

Carpi v Frosinone
Chievo v Milan
Empoli v Sampdoria
Fiorentina v Verona
Genoa v Torino
Internazionale v Bologna
Juventus v Sassuolo
Lazio v Atalanta
Palermo v Napoli
Udinese v Roma

MARCH 20, 2016

Atalanta v Bologna
Empoli v Palermo
Frosinone v Fiorentina
Milan v Lazio
Napoli v Genoa
Roma v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Chievo
Sassuolo v Udinese
Torino v Juventus
Verona v Carpi

APRIL 3, 2016

Atalanta v Milan
Bologna v Verona
Carpi v Sassuolo
Chievo v Palermo
Fiorentina v Sampdoria
Genoa v Frosinone
Internazionale v Torino
Juventus v Empoli
Lazio v Roma
Udinese v Napoli

APRIL 10, 2016

Chievo v Carpi
Empoli v Fiorentina
Frosinone v Internazionale
Milan v Juventus
Napoli v Verona
Palermo v Lazio
Roma v Bologna
Sampdoria v Udinese
Sassuolo v Genoa
Torino v Atalanta

APRIL 17, 2016

Atalanta v Roma
Bologna v Torino
Carpi v Genoa
Fiorentina v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Napoli
Juventus v Palermo
Lazio v Empoli
Sampdoria v Milan
Udinese v Chievo
Verona v Frosinone

APRIL 20, 2016

Chievo v Frosinone
Empoli v Verona
Genoa v Internazionale
Juventus v Lazio
Milan v Carpi
Napoli v Bologna
Palermo v Atalanta
Roma v Torino
Sassuolo v Sampdoria
Udinese v Fiorentina

APRIL 24, 2016

Atalanta v Chievo
Bologna v Genoa
Carpi v Empoli
Fiorentina v Juventus
Frosinone v Palermo
Internazionale v Udinese
Roma v Napoli
Sampdoria v Lazio
Torino v Sassuolo
Verona v Milan

MAY 1, 2016

Chievo v Fiorentina
Empoli v Bologna
Genoa v Roma
Juventus v Carpi
Lazio v Internazionale
Milan v Frosinone
Napoli v Atalanta
Palermo v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Verona
Udinese v Torino

MAY 8, 2016

Atalanta v Udinese
Bologna v Milan
Carpi v Lazio
Fiorentina v Palermo
Frosinone v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Empoli
Roma v Chievo
Sampdoria v Genoa
Torino v Napoli
Verona v Juventus

MAY 15, 2016

Chievo v Bologna
Empoli v Torino
Genoa v Atalanta
Juventus v Sampdoria
Lazio v Fiorentina
Milan v Roma
Napoli v Frosinone
Palermo v Verona
Sassuolo v Internazionale
Udinese v Carpi

(All dates subject to change)

Bankrupt clubs rise again

Widzew Lodz – Polish champions in 1981, 1982, 1996 and 1997 – were declared bankrupt at the end of last season and officially dissolved in July. Just three days later, however, supporters established a brand new club who look likely to be admitted to this term's fourth tier.

"I know how difficult a job we have to do, but with the full support of our fans and a budget of a half a million zloty [£100,000] we should be able to exist, so I am really happy," says club chairman Marcin Ferdzyn.

Ferdzyn is the son of Jacek Ferdzyn, the architect of a new Widzew stadium which is currently under construction. It is being built with money from the city council, who also financed the home of Widzew's local rivals LKS – who themselves were declared bankrupt in May 2013 and also had to start again.

"Our stadium is due to be completed next year. Based on that, I am optimistic about the future," adds Ferdzyn.

Clubs going bust as a way to clear debts and start again is nothing new in Polish football. In 2003, Pogon Szczecin fans established Pogon Nowa (new Pogon) and they made it back to the top flight in 2012. Two years ago, Polonia Warsaw – who were national champions in 2000 – were declared bankrupt and started again, along with LKS Lodz, in the fourth tier and both gained promotion at the first attempt.

The current situation at Polonia looks especially promising after a new limited company took control this year, with Jerzy Engel, who coached the national side at the 2002 World Cup finals, as a chairman. The club have a budget of £500,000 – which is several times more than any other club at their level – and they plan to build a new stadium without any city council support.

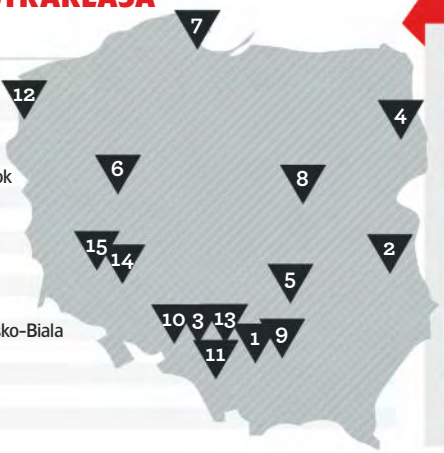
"It is a must that we create professional conditions for the team, even if they are only playing in the third division," says Engel. Of self-funding their new home

"It is a must that we create professional conditions for the team, even if they are only playing in the third division"

Polonia chairman Jerzy Engel

Promoted...Polonia Warsaw (in black) and LKS Lodz are in the third tier after starting again

POLISH EKSTRAKLASA 2015-16



1 Cracovia *(Krakow)*
Wisla Krakow
2 Gornik Leczna
3 Gornik Zabrze
4 Jagiellonia Bialystok
5 Korona Kielce
6 Lech Poznan
7 Lechia Gdansk
8 Legia Warsaw
9 Nieciecza
10 Piast Gliwice
11 Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biala
12 Pogon Szczecin
13 Ruch Chorzow
14 Slask Wroclaw
15 Zaglebie Lubin

TALKING POINTS

Wanted...Legia's Ondrej Duda (in green)

- After losing their league crown to Lech Poznan, Legia Warsaw coach Henning Berg is under huge pressure. Club chairman Boguslaw Lesnodorski has backed him so far, but the Norwegian must deliver this term.
- Slovakian midfielder Ondrej Duda started the season with Legia but Internazionale are keen on the 20-year-old and it remains to be seen whether he will still be in Poland at the end of the campaign.
- With Kamil Wilczek, the league's top scorer with 20 goals last term, having left for Serie A newcomers Carpi in Italy, will Piast Gliwice have enough to avoid relegation?
- Ekstraklasa attendances rose last season from an average of 8,317 to 8,378 while seven of the top flight made a profit. Will things continue in an upward fashion?

KEY DATES
The season started on July 17 and the split into two sections on April 9.

Key early games include
Legia Warsaw v Lech Poznan (Oct 23) and Wisla Krakow v Cracovia (Nov 27).

Making history...village team Nieciecza (in orange)

he explains: "This is a new idea in Polish football reality. It will be not only a stadium but a business centre as well, which should earn money for the club.

"Our aim is to come back to Ekstraklasa by 2020. In the coming season we aim for promotion to the second division."

In stark contrast to the grand old clubs who are battling their way back up from the bottom, Nieciecza are a team from a village of just 750 people who gained promotion to the top flight for the first time last season.

Funded by local business couple Krzysztof and Danuta Witkowski, the club represent the smallest village to play at the top level of a league in Europe.

They will, however, have to stage their opening home games of the campaign 50km away in Mielec while their modest stadium, surrounded by maize fields, is modernised to fulfil FA licensing criteria.

Dariusz Kurowski

Under pressure...Legia coach Henning Berg

ONES TO WATCH

MICHAL PAZDAN
(Legia Warsaw)
Tough centre-back or defensive midfielder who was signed from Jagiellonia Bialystok and is expected to play a big part in Legia's title challenge.

KRZYSZTOF MACZYNSKI
(Wisla Krakow)
The national team midfielder rejoined the club where he began his career after 18 months in China with Guizhou Renhe.

RADOSLAW CIERZNIAK
(Wisla Krakow)
The keeper is back to finish his career in Poland after three seasons in the Scottish Premiership with Dundee United.

JAROSLAW FOJUT
(Pogon Szczecin)
Centre-back who played one solitary Premier League game for Bolton Wanderers and has joined Pogon from Dundee United.

ADAM KOKOSZKA
(Slask Wroclaw)
Now 28, the former international central defender has returned to Wroclaw after a season playing in Russia with Torpedo Moscow.

Jesus swaps the champs for Sporting

Just three days after the curtain officially fell on the 2014-15 campaign, Portuguese football fans were already captivated by the prospect of the next season as Jorge Jesus' sensational switch of allegiance, from champions Benfica to cross-city rivals Sporting Lisbon, shook the domestic game to its very core.

To widespread astonishment, the charismatic 60-year-old coach walked out on Portugal's biggest club, having just guided them to their first back-to-back championships for 31 years.

During Jesus' six-year stewardship at the Estadio da Luz, Benfica had succeeded in reeling in and then overhauling serial winners Porto. He had put the famous old club back on top of the pile – and he did it by playing an exhilarating brand of attacking football befitting of the club's glorious past.

With Jesus as coach, the astute self-made businessman Luis Filipe Vieira as president and club legend Rui Costa as football director, titles and long-lost prestige, not to mention some much-needed stability, were brought to the club. So why did it end?

Jesus can be a rumbustious personality and often blunt ways no doubt created enemies at the club. He subsequently confided that he felt he was being pushed out over the course of last season. When pressed to elaborate he said: "When you have been in football for many years, you know when you are not wanted." He went on to claim that, at the end of the season, Benfica, in collusion with Portuguese super-agent Jorge Mendes, opened the door to a string of jobs abroad, with Paris Saint-Germain and Internazionale among them.

But when it became apparent JJ had no intention of going abroad, Sporting wasted little time in making him a lucrative offer. By then it was too late for Benfica to stop him from returning to the club where both he and his father played. Jesus insists money played no part in the decision – although it is safe to assume that the reported €6million a year salary he will earn at Sporting helped encourage him to put pen to paper.

As fascinating as the politics surrounding the exit of Benfica's longest-serving post-war manager are, the focus now falls on what he is capable of achieving at Sporting, who have won the Portuguese championship just twice in the last 33 years, and not since 2002.

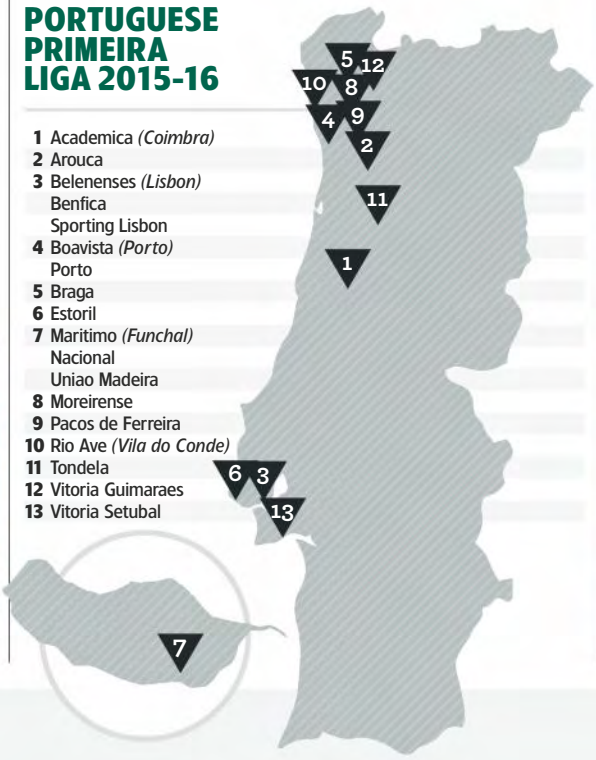
> "When you have been in football for many years, you know when you are not wanted"
>
> **Jorge Jesus**

Two issues in particular raise doubts about the potential success of an apparent "match made in heaven".

Jesus' modus operandi at Benfica was to buy unpolished raw talent, often at considerable cost, and expertly hone the skillset of the players in question to suit the team's needs. The fact that he did so exclusively with foreign players was ▸

Cup winner...Sporting's Islam Slimani

PORTUGUESE PRIMEIRA LIGA 2015-16



1 Academica *(Coimbra)*
2 Arouca
3 Belenenses *(Lisbon)*
Benfica
Sporting Lisbon
4 Boavista *(Porto)*
Porto
5 Braga
6 Estoril
7 Maritimo *(Funchal)*
Nacional
Uniao Madeira
8 Moreirense
9 Pacos de Ferreira
10 Rio Ave *(Vila do Conde)*
11 Tondela
12 Vitoria Guimaraes
13 Vitoria Setubal

Acclaim...Jesus is unveiled as Sporting's new coach

ONES TO WATCH

GIANNELLI IMBULA
(Porto)
The French midfielder cost €20m when signed from Marseille during the summer. That sort of fee demands an immediate return.

MEHDI CARCELA-GONZALEZ
(Benfica)
Much will be expected of the 26-year-old Moroccan midfielder after he impressed at Standard Liege.

TEOFILO GUTIERREZ
(Sporting Lisbon)
The former River Plate striker keeps goalscorer extraordinaire Jackson Martinez on the bench for Colombia.

WILLIAM CARVALHO
(Sporting Lisbon)
"Under me, William will play even better," says new Sporting boss Jorge Jesus. Now that would be quite something...

JOAO AFONSO
(Vitoria Guimaraes)
After a brilliant debut season in the top flight last term, can the 25-year-old centre-back do it again?

PROMOTED TEAMS

TONDELA
A remarkable achievement for the small northern club who were playing in the district leagues just 10 years ago.

UNIAO DA MADEIRA
Back in the Portuguese top flight after a 20-year hiatus.

On target...Benfica's Talisca celebrates a goal against Paris Saint-Germain in the International Champions Cup in Toronto

a recurrent bone of contention among Benfica fans, who felt he never gave home-grown youngsters a fair chance to prove themselves in the first team.

Jesus refutes the claims, saying quality alone, and neither age nor nationality, were considerations in his team selections. But the roaring success last season of Andre Gomes at Valencia and Bernardo Silva at Monaco – the former played sparingly by Jesus, the latter almost never – confirmed that making use of the academy players was an area in which he did not excel. Indeed, Benfica frequently lined up with not a single Portuguese player during his time in the dugout.

So it will be interesting to see how Jesus' seeming lack of faith in Portuguese youth will be conciliated with a club whose very identity is built around its ability to produce a hugely impressive quality and quantity of alumni at its famed Alcochete Academy. In Sporting's final Champions League match of last season, against Chelsea, eight of the players used at Stamford Bridge had come through the club's academy.

A second intriguing aspect is how the relationship will pan out between the fiery new coach and the brash club president, Bruno De Carvalho. Since his election in 2013, Carvalho has shaken up the institution from top to bottom, but his hard-nosed single-mindedness and lust to return Sporting to the top comes at a cost. Jesualdo Ferreira, Leonardo Jardim and Marco Silva all did decent jobs at the Estadio Jose Alvalade under Carvalho, yet none lasted more than a season alongside the highly driven supremo – and it was literally alongside him, given his liking for sharing the dugout with the coach and substitutes during matches.

Carvalho even managed to find fault in the placid and highly rated Silva – who last season led Sporting to their first trophy in seven years with a Portuguese Cup triumph, suffered fewer league defeats than champions Benfica and oversaw a creditable Champions League campaign.

"Bruno De Carvalho is like me," said Jesus when questioned about a potential personality clash. "He's a very dynamic man with a huge passion for what he does. For sure we will get on very well."

It promises to be quite a ride.

Tom Kundert

TALKING POINTS

- For a second successive summer, Porto have gone on a summer-recruitment splurge. It did not work out last term, but with Spanish coach Julen Lopetegui now familiar with the pitfalls of Portuguese football, they must be considered hot title favourites.
- Porto's capture of the charismatic World Cup, European Championship and Champions League-winning goalkeeper Iker Casillas made headlines for weeks in Portugal. But he seemed to be in decline in recent seasons and the former Real Madrid man will be expected to bring more than just prestige.
- Few doubt Morocco international Adel Taarabt's talent, but his attitude is questionable. "Here we work much harder than in England," he said after joining Benfica from QPR. Is he turning over a new leaf?

Charisma...Casillas

- For the first time in 15 years, Madeira has three clubs in the top flight after Uniao's promotion. Not bad considering the island's population is just over a quarter of a million.
- Maxi Pereira won't be looking forward to visiting the Estadio da Luz after leaving Benfica for Porto. A mock-up of the Uruguayan full-back with a noose around his neck has already appeared in the stadium.
- Belenenses are to build a squad almost entirely of Portuguese players – a courageous decision that will win the club many friends.
- After crashing and burning at Porto, coach Paulo Fonseca went back to Pacos de Ferreira, where he made his name, and again excelled, leading to his appointment at Braga. A positive season may well see top clubs reaching for his phone number again.

NEW COACHES

RICARDO SA PINTO *(Belenenses, above)* Returns home after a spell in Greece.

LITO VIDIGAL *(Arouca)* Did a tremendous job at Belenenses last season before falling out with the club president.

VITOR PANEIRA *(Tondela)* Ex-Benfica player making his top-flight debut as a coach.

JORGE JESUS *(Sporting Lisbon)* Revived Benfica and hopes to do same at the club he played for.

RUI VITORIA *(Benfica, below)* Earned his big chance after working miracles on a shoestring budget at Vitoria Guimaraes.

LUIS NORTON DE MATOS *(Uniao da Madeira)* Has had spells at Etoile Lusitana in Guinea-Bissau and Benfica B.

ARMANDO EVANGELISTA *(Vitoria Guimaraes)* Promoted from within after Rui Vitoria's exit, he led the under-19 and B teams.

QUIM MACHADO *(Vitoria Setubal)* Takes over after a long list of previous coaching jobs, including stints in Hungary and Poland.

PAULO FONSECA *(Braga, below)* Steadily rebuilding his reputation after failing at Porto.

JORGE SIMAO *(Pacos Ferreira)* The youngest coach, at 38, he spent last term with Belenenses.

Feet first...Rio Ave's Andre Vilas Boas (right) takes on Sporting's Slimani

Pressure...Braga (red) v Benfica

Taking aim...Porto's Maicon against Vitoria Guimares

AUGUST 16, 2015

Belenenses v Rio Ave
Benfica v Estoril
Braga v Nacional
Moreirense v Arouca
Pacos Ferreira v Academica
Porto v Vit Guimaraes
Tondela v Sporting Lisbon
Uniao Madeira v Maritimo
Vitoria Setubal v Boavista

AUGUST 23, 2015

Academica v Vitoria Setubal
Arouca v Benfica
Boavista v Tondela
Estoril v Moreirense
Maritimo v Porto
Nacional v Uniao Madeira
Rio Ave v Braga
Sporting Lisbon v Pacos Ferreira
Vit Guimaraes v Belenenses

AUGUST 30, 2015

Academica v Sporting Lisbon
Belenenses v Maritimo
Benfica v Moreirense
Braga v Boavista
Pacos Ferreira v Arouca
Porto v Estoril
Tondela v Nacional
Uniao Madeira v Vit Guimaraes
Vitoria Setubal v Rio Ave

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Arouca v Porto
Benfica v Belenenses
Boavista v Pacos Ferreira
Estoril v Braga
Maritimo v Vitoria Setubal
Moreirense v Uniao Madeira
Nacional v Academica
Rio Ave v Sporting Lisbon
Vit Guimaraes v Tondela

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Academica v Boavista
Belenenses v Moreirense
Braga v Maritimo
Pacos Ferreira v Rio Ave
Porto v Benfica
Sporting Lisbon v Nacional
Tondela v Estoril
Uniao Madeira v Arouca
Vitoria Setubal v Vit Guimaraes

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Arouca v Belenenses
Benfica v Pacos Ferreira
Boavista v Sporting Lisbon
Estoril v Uniao Madeira
Maritimo v Tondela
Moreirense v Porto
Nacional v Vitoria Setubal
Rio Ave v Academica
Vit Guimaraes v Braga

OCTOBER 4, 2015

Academica v Maritimo
Braga v Arouca
Pacos Ferreira v Nacional
Porto v Belenenses
Rio Ave v Boavista
Sporting Lisbon v Vit Guimaraes
Tondela v Moreirense
Uniao Madeira v Benfica
Vitoria Setubal v Estoril

OCTOBER 25, 2015

Arouca v Tondela
Belenenses v Uniao Madeira
Benfica v Sporting Lisbon
Estoril v Rio Ave
Nacional v Boavista
Porto v Braga
Maritimo v Pacos Ferreira
Moreirense v Vitoria Setubal
Vit Guimaraes v Academica

NOVEMBER 1, 2015

Academica v Moreirense
Boavista v Maritimo
Braga v Belenenses
Pacos Ferreira v Vit Guimaraes
Rio Ave v Nacional
Sporting Lisbon v Estoril
Tondela v Benfica
Uniao Madeira v Porto
Vitoria Setubal v Arouca

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Arouca v Sporting Lisbon
Belenenses v Tondela
Benfica v Boavista
Estoril v Academica
Maritimo v Rio Ave
Moreirense v Pacos Ferreira
Porto v Vitoria Setubal
Uniao Madeira v Braga
Vit Guimaraes v Nacional

NOVEMBER 29, 2015

Academica v Arouca
Boavista v Vit Guimaraes
Braga v Benfica
Nacional v Maritimo
Pacos Ferreira v Estoril
Rio Ave v Moreirense
Sporting Lisbon v Belenenses
Tondela v Porto
Vitoria Setubal v Uniao Madeira

DECEMBER 6, 2015

Arouca v Boavista
Belenenses v Vitoria Setubal
Benfica v Academica
Estoril v Nacional
Maritimo v Sporting Lisbon
Moreirense v Braga
Porto v Pacos Ferreira
Uniao Madeira v Tondela
Vit Guimaraes v Rio Ave

DECEMBER 13, 2015

Academica v Belenenses
Boavista v Estoril
Nacional v Porto
Pacos Ferreira v Uniao Madeira
Rio Ave v Arouca
Sporting Lisbon v Moreirense
Tondela v Braga
Vit Guimaraes v Maritimo
Vitoria Setubal v Benfica

DECEMBER 20, 2015

Arouca v Maritimo
Belenenses v Boavista
Benfica v Rio Ave
Braga v Pacos Ferreira
Estoril v Vit Guimaraes
Moreirense v Nacional
Porto v Academica
Tondela v Vitoria Setubal
Uniao Madeira v Sporting Lisbon

JANUARY 2, 2016

Academica v Uniao Madeira
Boavista v Moreirense
Maritimo v Estoril
Nacional v Arouca
Pacos Ferreira v Belenenses
Rio Ave v Tondela
Sporting Lisbon v Porto
Vit Guimaraes v Benfica
Vitoria Setubal v Braga

JANUARY 6, 2016

Arouca v Estoril
Belenenses v Nacional
Benfica v Maritimo
Braga v Academica
Moreirense v Vit Guimaraes
Porto v Rio Ave
Tondela v Pacos Ferreira
Uniao Madeira v Boavista
Vitoria Setubal v Sporting Lisbon

JANUARY 10, 2016

Academica v Tondela
Boavista v Porto
Estoril v Belenenses
Maritimo v Moreirense
Nacional v Benfica
Pacos Ferreira v Vitoria Setubal
Rio Ave v Uniao Madeira
Sporting Lisbon v Braga
Vit Guimaraes v Arouca

JANUARY 17, 2016

Academica v Pacos Ferreira
Arouca v Moreirense
Boavista v Vitoria Setubal
Estoril v Benfica
Maritimo v Uniao Madeira
Nacional v Braga
Rio Ave v Belenenses
Sporting Lisbon v Tondela
Vit Guimaraes v Porto

JANUARY 24, 2016

Belenenses v Vit Guimaraes
Benfica v Arouca
Braga v Rio Ave
Moreirense v Estoril
Pacos Ferreira v Sporting Lisbon
Porto v Maritimo
Tondela v Boavista
Uniao Madeira v Nacional
Vitoria Setubal v Academica

JANUARY 31, 2016

Arouca v Pacos Ferreira
Boavista v Braga
Estoril v Porto
Maritimo v Belenenses
Moreirense v Benfica
Nacional v Tondela
Rio Ave v Vitoria Setubal
Sporting Lisbon v Academica
Vit Guimaraes v Uniao Madeira

FEBRUARY 7, 2016

Academica v Nacional
Belenenses v Benfica
Braga v Estoril
Pacos Ferreira v Boavista
Porto v Arouca
Sporting Lisbon v Rio Ave
Tondela v Vit Guimaraes
Uniao Madeira v Moreirense
Vitoria Setubal v Maritimo

FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Arouca v Uniao Madeira
Benfica v Porto
Boavista v Academica
Estoril v Tondela
Maritimo v Braga
Moreirense v Belenenses
Nacional v Sporting Lisbon
Rio Ave v Pacos Ferreira
Vit Guimaraes v Vitoria Setubal

FEBRUARY 21, 2016

Academica v Rio Ave
Belenenses v Arouca
Braga v Vit Guimaraes
Pacos Ferreira v Benfica
Porto v Moreirense
Sporting Lisbon v Boavista
Tondela v Maritimo
Uniao Madeira v Estoril
Vitoria Setubal v Nacional

FEBRUARY 28, 2016

Arouca v Braga
Belenenses v Porto
Benfica v Uniao Madeira
Boavista v Rio Ave
Estoril v Vitoria Setubal
Maritimo v Academica
Moreirense v Tondela
Nacional v Pacos Ferreira
Vit Guimaraes v Sporting Lisbon

MARCH 6, 2016

Academica v Vit Guimaraes
Boavista v Nacional
Braga v Porto
Pacos Ferreira v Maritimo
Rio Ave v Estoril
Sporting Lisbon v Benfica
Tondela v Arouca
Uniao Madeira v Belenenses
Vitoria Setubal v Moreirense

MARCH 13, 2016

Arouca v Vitoria Setubal
Belenenses v Braga
Benfica v Tondela
Estoril v Sporting Lisbon
Nacional v Rio Ave
Porto v Uniao Madeira
Maritimo v Boavista
Moreirense v Academica
Vit Guimaraes v Pacos Ferreira

MARCH 20, 2016

Academica v Estoril
Boavista v Benfica
Braga v Uniao Madeira
Nacional v Vit Guimaraes
Pacos Ferreira v Moreirense
Rio Ave v Maritimo
Sporting Lisbon v Arouca
Tondela v Belenenses
Vitoria Setubal v Porto

APRIL 3, 2016

Arouca v Academica
Belenenses v Sporting Lisbon
Benfica v Braga
Estoril v Pacos Ferreira
Maritimo v Nacional
Moreirense v Rio Ave
Porto v Tondela
Uniao Madeira v Vitoria Setubal
Vit Guimaraes v Boavista

APRIL 10, 2016

Academica v Benfica
Boavista v Arouca
Braga v Moreirense
Nacional v Estoril
Pacos Ferreira v Porto
Rio Ave v Vit Guimaraes
Sporting Lisbon v Maritimo
Tondela v Uniao Madeira
Vitoria Setubal v Belenenses

APRIL 17, 2016

Arouca v Rio Ave
Belenenses v Academica
Benfica v Vitoria Setubal
Braga v Tondela
Estoril v Boavista
Maritimo v Vit Guimaraes
Moreirense v Sporting Lisbon
Porto v Nacional
Uniao Madeira v Pacos Ferreira

APRIL 24, 2016

Academica v Porto
Boavista v Belenenses
Maritimo v Arouca
Nacional v Moreirense
Pacos Ferreira v Braga
Rio Ave v Benfica
Sporting Lisbon v Uniao Madeira
Vit Guimaraes v Estoril
Vitoria Setubal v Tondela

APRIL 30, 2016

Arouca v Nacional
Belenenses v Pacos Ferreira
Benfica v Vit Guimaraes
Braga v Vitoria Setubal
Estoril v Maritimo
Moreirense v Boavista
Porto v Sporting Lisbon
Tondela v Rio Ave
Uniao Madeira v Academica

MAY 8, 2016

Academica v Braga
Boavista v Uniao Madeira
Estoril v Arouca
Maritimo v Benfica
Nacional v Belenenses
Pacos Ferreira v Tondela
Rio Ave v Porto
Sporting Lisbon v Vitoria Setubal
Vit Guimaraes v Moreirense

MAY 15, 2016

Arouca v Vit Guimaraes
Belenenses v Estoril
Benfica v Nacional
Braga v Sporting Lisbon
Moreirense v Maritimo
Porto v Boavista
Tondela v Academica
Uniao Madeira v Rio Ave
Vitoria Setubal v Pacos Ferreira

(All dates subject to change)

Steaua must stand on their own two feet

Romanian champions for the past three seasons, Steaua have been set two goals for this season by their eccentric owner Gigi Becali: retain the league title and become self-sufficient.

"Steaua will auto-finance itself," claims Becali, who was recently released after serving two years in jail and has vowed to make no further investment in the team. "Now we have €10million in the club's accounts. If we don't qualify for the Champions League or the Europa League group stage then we'll depend on the money the players produce.

"If they don't make enough for the team, then we'll enter insolvency."

All of this will have to be achieved with a new man in charge as 34-year-old

Main man...Steaua captain turned coach Mirel Rudoi

former club captain Mirel Rudoi has been handed his first coaching job.

Rudoi, who is Becali's godson, does not have the technical qualifications required by UEFA so he will officially become the Bucharest club's director of football for European games, with assistant Massimo Pedrazzini taking over as coach.

Although Rudoi's cult-hero status will ensure he has the fans' backing, he may not see many of them as supporters' groups continue to boycott matches.

"This is not a team that represents us right now," says ultras group leader Dorin Taban. "We don't understand what's happening and we feel there should be an explanation.

"If it doesn't happen, we won't return. This club will never be the same without

Success...Gregory Tade celebrates scoring for Steaua in the Champions League qualifiers

ROMANIAN LIGA 1 2015-16

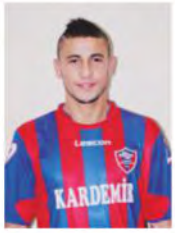
1 Astra Giurgiu
2 Botosani
3 CFR Cluj
4 Concordia Chiajna
5 CSMS Iasi
6 CS Uni Craiova
7 Dinamo Bucharest
Steaua Bucharest
8 Pandurii Targu Jiu
9 Petrolul Ploiesti
10 Poli Timisoara
11 Targu Mures
12 Viitorul Constanta
13 Voluntari

ONES TO WATCH

KEY DATES
Season started on July 10 and will finish in May.

Key early games include Targu Mures v Astra Giurgiu (Oct 23) and Dinamo v Steaua (Nov 17).

NICOLAE STANCIU *(Steaua)*
A creative midfielder who drives the team forward, having found his place behind the striker and displaying the qualities required to be a number 10.



JUGURTHA HAMROUN *(Steaua)*
The Algerian was signed from relegated Otelul Galati after he had already agreed a formal contract with Giresunspor in Turkey.

CONSTANTIN BUDESCU (Astra Giurgiu)
Club captain and playmaker who is capable of scoring with spectacular free-kicks from long range.

IANIS HAGI *(Viitorul)*
Signed by Fiorentina, the 16-year-old will play one more season for his dad's club. He is expected to assume a more important role this term.

FLORIN CERNAT *(Viitorul)*
The 35-year-old returned to boyhood club Otelul Galati last season then signed for Viitorul, saying: "It's my dream to play under Hagi."

Euro clash...Astra's Junior Morais (in white) challenges Danny Williams of Inverness Caledonian Thistle in a Europa League qualifier

> "Steaua will auto-finance itself. If [the players] don't make enough for the team, then we'll enter insolvency"
>
> **Steaua owner Gigi Becali**

us. We are its spirit." Taban and thousands like him are protesting at Steaua's new identity, which has done away with all the old symbols that relate to its past as the army team.

Steaua attracted only 5,500 to the 55,000-capacity National Arena, where they have played home games since being kicked out of their Ghencea Stadium and training facilities by the army. This internal unrest is the biggest threat to Steaua's hopes of a fourth straight title as their rivals will offer little competition this term.

Bucharest neighbours Dinamo have more pressing issues, with a ban from Europe doing little to help their battle against insolvency, while Rapid aren't even in the top flight this term, having been relegated last season.

Astra Giurgiu and Targu Mures are likely to be Steaua's closest challengers, but they too have problems. Astra's owner Ioan Niculae, one of Romania's richest men, was jailed for two-and-a-half years in April for illegally sponsoring a politician, while Targu Mures' accounts have been blocked by the anti-corruption department on suspicion of illegal financing.

Steaua, meanwhile, were the only Romanian club able to afford transfers this summer. Left alone to hunt for national glory, Europe may be their only valid source of survival in a bankrupt environment.

Emanuel Rosu

TALKING POINTS

- For the first time, this season the league will split into two groups after each side has played 26 games, with six teams competing for European places and the other eight trying to avoid relegation. "It's a disaster," says former league president Dumitru Dragomir of the new set-up.
- "I will never fire him. He is the man I trust," says Steaua owner Gigi Becali of his coach and godson, Mirel Rudoi. However, failure in Europe could change all that.
- Dinamo will be hoping to challenge for a place in the top three, even though they aren't allowed to enter European competition due to insolvency. "The last two seasons were painful, we can't afford to slip once more", says chairman Dinu Gheorghe.
- Viitorul, the club owned and coached by Gheorghe Hagi, have their sights set on qualifying for the Europa League. Hagi says: "We have the young ones, but we need experience. This is a good team, you'll see what my boys can do."
- Dan Petrescu left Targu Mures after just one game as coach. With the club's accounts blocked, the squad have all had to accept less lucrative contracts and there are fears they may not last the season.

One-game wonder... Petrescu has left troubled Targu Mures

Chance for home grown coaches

Following Murat Yakin's lacklustre performance as boss of Spartak Moscow, the country's most popular club has now put its faith in Dmitri Alenichev, the 42-year-old who played in four of their nine Premier League title wins.

The last of those, however, came in 2001 and "The People's Team" are long overdue some success in the domestic championship.

A former MP and the only Russian player to have won both the Champions League and the UEFA Cup, Alenichev gave up his political career and began coaching in the old city of Tula in 2011.

Known for its traditional pryaniki cakes and the local gun factory, the city's club side, Arsenal, managed three successive promotions under the former Porto star, reaching the top flight for the first time last season. Although they were relegated at the end of the campaign, Alenichev made a decent impression – especially when his side beat Spartak.

It was not only his ability in the dugout that raised eyebrows; he also demonstrated his strength of character by sending a reserve side to Moscow in protest against an unjust league decision to play Arsenal's home game against CSKA in the capital due to the poor condition of the Tula pitch.

With former Spartak team-mate Dmitri Ananko following him from Arsenal to Spartak, Alenichev has also found a role on the coaching staff for former club legend Yegor Titov, while another ex-Spartak star Sergei Rodionov is now general director.

The trend for well-known former players taking top jobs has continued elsewhere as a result of the public's dissatisfaction with expensive foreign specialists failing to produce results.

Public Enemy number one in this respect was undoubtedly national coach Fabio Capello – with his reported annual salary of €7million – who oversaw two Euro qualifying defeats by Austria. The Italian finally lost his position in July, with CSKA boss Leonid Slutsky

Record...Lokomotiv boss Igor Cherevchenko is the first man to win the Russian Cup as both player and coach

Opener...Spartak celebrate scoring against Ufa in the first league game of the season

"The new format will become the end of the development of Russian football. When you take away Hulk, Witsel, Javi Garcia, what will the Russian championship be left with?"

Zenit coach Andre Villas-Boas on the new 6+5 foreign-player quotas

replacing him and combining both roles.

Once nicknamed the "Russian Mourinho", the 44-year-old Slutsky was until recently the only recognised "young" home-grown specialist in the Russian Premier League.

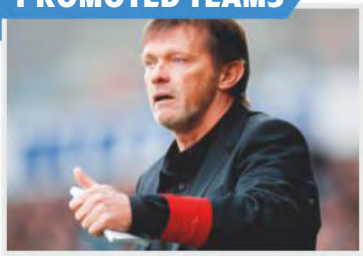
Now he has been joined by such former playing talents as international striker Igor Kolyvanov, who has been highly effective as Ufa coach, ex-Dynamo Moscow forward Sergei Kiryakov, who has made a promising start in charge of the national under-21 side, and Dmitri Khokhlov, who went from Dynamo youth-squad boss to coach of Kuban Krasnodar.

Meanwhile, reigning champions Zenit have former Russia internationals Igor

RUSSIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2015-16

1 Amkar Perm
2 Anzhi *(Makhachkala)*
3 CSKA Moscow
Dynamo Moscow
Lokomotiv Moscow
Spartak Moscow
4 Krasnodar
Kuban Krasnodar
5 Krylia Sovetov *(Samara)*
6 Mordovia *(Saransk)*
7 Rostov
8 Rubin Kazan
9 Terek *(Grozny)*
10 Ufa
11 Ural *(Yekaterinburg)*
12 Zenit *(St Petersburg)*

PROMOTED TEAMS



KRYLIYA SOVETOV SAMARA
Won the second division and return to the top flight, after a one-year absence, under the guidance of coach Franky Vercauteren of Belguim.

ANZHI
A one-time sensation of Russian football who failed to grow into a top club due to unexpected financial difficulties.

NEW COACHES

ANDREY KOBELEV *(Dynamo Moscow)*
Ex Dynamo and Zenit midfielder who had a short spell with Real Betis in the 90s.

DMITRI ALENICHEV *(Spartak Moscow)*
Back at the club where he once controlled midfield before moving to Italy and Portugal.

DMITRI KHOKHLOV *(Kuban Krasnodar)*
Former Russia midfielder who won two titles in charge of Dynamo's youth squad.

ANDREI GORDEYEV *(Mordovia Saransk)*
Coached Saturn before they went bankrupt and was Guus Hiddink's assistant at Anzhi.

VICTOR GONCHARENKO *(Ural)*
Belarusian who was surprisingly fired by Kuban last season.

YURI SEMIN *(Anzhi)*
Russian coaching guru picked up by Anzhi after a good season with Mordovia.

Change...CSKA (in red) could lose their coach to the national team

Simutenkov and Sergei Semak assisting Andre Villas-Boas, former captain Andrey Kobelev is boss of Dynamo Moscow and Igor Cherevchenko is the top man at Lokomotiv Moscow – where, last season, he became the first Russian to win the national cup as a player and a coach, both with Lokomotiv Moscow. Although his side lost to Zenit in July's Russian Super Cup, they took the champions to penalties and looked the better side overall.

Whether these new, young local coaches can revive the Russian Premier League season remains to be seen, but something needs to be done. With low attendances, poor TV ratings and hugely disappointing international results, fans are starting to turn their backs on the game. A recent opinion poll suggested that 73 per cent of Russians are indifferent to football – the highest ever figure for such a survey.

And it's not just the ordinary fan who is giving up. Even the country's president Vladimir Putin, who is known for his love of sport and regularly plays ice hockey, has said he does no longer watches football.

Victor Gusev

TALKING POINTS

- Barred from European competition due to UEFA sanctions and a dire financial situation, Andrey Kobelev says he is ready to revive Dynamo Moscow's fortunes by building a team around young, home-grown players.
- While the new coaching staff have raised hopes at Spartak, challenging for the title will surely be beyond the Red and Whites – but just how much progress can they make?

Goal drought ...Dzyuba

- Zenit striker Artyom Dzyuba, signed from Spartak, is potentially the best in the league but he needs to regain his goalscoring form. However, unlike the champions' other front men Hulk and Salomon Rondon, he is often too dependable on his team-mates.
- Will the 6+5 rule – which means no more than six foreign players at one time on the pitch per team – work to the benefit of the Russian Premier League? Many believe that 10+15 in a teams' squad, with no limitations per game, would have made the league more competitive and provide a proper challenge for young Russian players.
- Just how much will Zenit miss the injured Danny and Andrei Arshavin, who was released in the summer?
- Will the new stadiums that are under construction, and expectations for the 2018 World Cup, change people's attitude and raise interest to the domestic game?

Work in progress... Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium

ONES TO WATCH

ANDREI ARSHAVIN *(Kuban Krasnodar)*
Now with Kuban after his release by Zenit, the striker aims to prove he is ready for a national team recall.

HULK *(Zenit)*
The league's best player wants to repeat his success this season and regain a Brazilian national team spot.

ROMAN YEREMENKO *(CSKA Moscow)*
Finland midfielder with Russian roots who was CSKA's main creative force last season.

ZE LUIS *(Spartak Moscow)*
Striker from Cabo Verde, signed in pre-season from Braga and scored on league debut against Ufa.

IGOR DENISOV *(Dynamo Moscow)*
Banished to the reserves after a row with coach Cherchesov but back in the fold after he was fired.

MATHIEU VALBUENA *(Dynamo Moscow)*
French winger who changed Dynamo's attacking game last summer before fading late on.

FEDOR SMOLOV *(Krasnodar)*
Back in the national squad after being on Dynamo's bench. Joined Krasnodar in the summer.

Progress...can Mordovia Saransk (in red) improve on last season?

National coach...CSKA's Slutsky

Full stretch...Bohdan Butko of Amkar Perm (in white)

JULY 17, 2015
Spartak v Ufa

JULY 18, 2015
CSKA v Rubin Kazan
Rostov v Terek Grozny

JULY 19, 2015
Anzhi v Krylia Sovetov
Mordovia v Loko Moscow
Zenit v Dyn Moscow

JULY 20, 2015
Amkar Perm v FK Krasnodar
Kuban Krasnodar v Ural

JULY 24, 2015
Krylia Sovetov v CSKA

JULY 25, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Mordovia
Terek Grozny v Kuban Krasnodar
Ufa v Rostov

JULY 26, 2015
FK Krasnodar v Spartak
Rubin Kazan v Amkar Perm
Ural v Zenit

JULY 27, 2015
Anzhi v Loko Moscow

JULY 31, 2015
Kuban Krasnodar v Ufa

AUGUST 1, 2015
Amkar Perm v Krylia Sovetov
CSKA v Anzhi
Zenit v Terek Grozny

AUGUST 2, 2015
Loko Moscow v Dyn Moscow
Mordovia v Ural
Rostov v FK Krasnodar

AUGUST 3, 2015
Spartak v Rubin Kazan

AUGUST 7, 2015
Terek Grozny v Mordovia

AUGUST 8, 2015
Anzhi v Dyn Moscow
Ural v Loko Moscow

AUGUST 9, 2015
CSKA v Amkar Perm
Krylia Sovetov v Spartak
Ufa v Zenit

AUGUST 10, 2015
FK Krasnodar v Kuban Krasnodar
Rubin Kazan v Rostov

AUGUST 14, 2015
Amkar Perm v Anzhi

AUGUST 15, 2015
Kuban Krasnodar v Rubin Kazan
Spartak v CSKA
Zenit v FK Krasnodar

AUGUST 16, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Ural
Loko Moscow v Terek Grozny
Rostov v Krylia Sovetov

AUGUST 17, 2015
Mordovia v Ufa

AUGUST 21, 2015
Terek Grozny v Dyn Moscow

AUGUST 22, 2015
Amkar Perm v Spartak
Anzhi v Ural
CSKA v Rostov

AUGUST 23, 2015
FK Krasnodar v Mordovia
Rubin Kazan v Zenit
Ufa v Loko Moscow

AUGUST 24, 2015
Krylia Sovetov v Kuban Krasnodar

AUGUST 28, 2015
Rostov v Amkar Perm
Ural v Terek Grozny

AUGUST 29, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Ufa
Spartak v Anzhi
Zenit v Krylia Sovetov

AUGUST 30, 2015
Kuban Krasnodar v CSKA
Loko Moscow v FK Krasnodar
Mordovia v Rubin Kazan

SEPTEMBER 11, 2015
Amkar Perm v Kuban Krasnodar
Anzhi v Terek Grozny
CSKA v Zenit
FK Krasnodar v Dyn Moscow
Krylia Sovetov v Mordovia
Rubin Kazan v Loko Moscow
Spartak v Rostov
Ufa v Ural

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Rubin Kazan
Kuban Krasnodar v Spartak
Loko Moscow v Krylia Sovetov
Mordovia v CSKA
Rostov v Anzhi
Terek Grozny v Ufa
Ural v FK Krasnodar
Zenit v Amkar Perm

SEPTEMBER 26, 2015
Amkar Perm v Mordovia
Anzhi v Ufa
CSKA v Loko Moscow
FK Krasnodar v Terek Grozny
Krylia Sovetov v Dyn Moscow
Rostov v Kuban Krasnodar
Rubin Kazan v Ural
Spartak v Zenit

OCTOBER 2, 2015
Dyn Moscow v CSKA
Kuban Krasnodar v Anzhi
Loko Moscow v Amkar Perm
Mordovia v Spartak
Terek Grozny v Rubin Kazan
Ufa v FK Krasnodar
Ural v Krylia Sovetov
Zenit v Rostov

OCTOBER 16, 2015
Amkar Perm v Dyn Moscow
Anzhi v FK Krasnodar
CSKA v Ural
Krylia Sovetov v Terek Grozny
Kuban Krasnodar v Zenit
Rostov v Mordovia
Rubin Kazan v Ufa
Spartak v Loko Moscow

OCTOBER 23, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Spartak
FK Krasnodar v Rubin Kazan
Loko Moscow v Rostov
Mordovia v Kuban Krasnodar
Terek Grozny v CSKA
Ufa v Krylia Sovetov
Ural v Amkar Perm
Zenit v Anzhi

OCTOBER 30, 2015
Amkar Perm v Terek Grozny
Anzhi v Rubin Kazan
CSKA v Ufa
Krylia Sovetov v FK Krasnodar
Kuban Krasnodar v Loko Moscow
Rostov v Dyn Moscow
Spartak v Ural
Zenit v Mordovia

NOVEMBER 6, 2015
Dyn Moscow v Kuban Krasnodar
FK Krasnodar v CSKA
Loko Moscow v Zenit
Mordovia v Anzhi
Rubin Kazan v Krylia Sovetov
Terek Grozny v Spartak
Ufa v Amkar Perm
Ural v Rostov

NOVEMBER 20, 2015
Amkar Perm v Rubin Kazan
CSKA v Krylia Sovetov
Kuban Krasnodar v Terek Grozny
Loko Moscow v Anzhi
Mordovia v Dyn Moscow
Rostov v Ufa
Spartak v FK Krasnodar
Zenit v Ural

NOVEMBER 27, 2015
Anzhi v CSKA
Dyn Moscow v Loko Moscow
FK Krasnodar v Rostov
Krylia Sovetov v Amkar Perm
Rubin Kazan v Spartak
Terek Grozny v Zenit

DECEMBER 1, 2015
Amkar Perm v CSKA
Dyn Moscow v Anzhi
Kuban Krasnodar v FK Krasnodar
Loko Moscow v Ural
Mordovia v Terek Grozny
Rostov v Rubin Kazan
Spartak v Krylia Sovetov
Zenit v Ufa

MARCH 4, 2016
Anzhi v Amkar Perm
CSKA v Spartak
FK Krasnodar v Zenit
Krylia Sovetov v Rostov
Rubin Kazan v Kuban Krasnodar
Terek Grozny v Loko Moscow
Ufa v Mordovia
Ural v Dyn Moscow

MARCH 11, 2016
Dyn Moscow v Terek Grozny
Kuban Krasnodar v Krylia Sovetov
Loko Moscow v Ufa
Mordovia v FK Krasnodar
Rostov v CSKA
Spartak v Amkar Perm
Ural v Anzhi
Zenit v Rubin Kazan

MARCH 18, 2016
Amkar Perm v Rostov
Anzhi v Spartak
CSKA v Kuban Krasnodar
FK Krasnodar v Loko Moscow
Krylia Sovetov v Zenit
Rubin Kazan v Mordovia
Terek Grozny v Ural
Ufa v Dyn Moscow

APRIL 1, 2016
Dyn Moscow v FK Krasnodar
Kuban Krasnodar v Amkar Perm
Loko Moscow v Rubin Kazan
Mordovia v Krylia Sovetov
Rostov v Spartak
Terek Grozny v Anzhi
Ural v Ufa
Zenit v CSKA

APRIL 8, 2016
Amkar Perm v Zenit
Anzhi v Rostov
CSKA v Mordovia
FK Krasnodar v Ural
Krylia Sovetov v Loko Moscow
Rubin Kazan v Dyn Moscow
Spartak v Kuban Krasnodar
Ufa v Terek Grozny

APRIL 15, 2016
Dyn Moscow v Krylia Sovetov
Kuban Krasnodar v Rostov
Loko Moscow v CSKA
Mordovia v Amkar Perm
Terek Grozny v FK Krasnodar
Ufa v Anzhi
Ural v Rubin Kazan
Zenit v Spartak

FRIDAY 22ND APRIL 2016
Amkar Perm v Loko Moscow
Anzhi v Kuban Krasnodar
CSKA v Dyn Moscow
FK Krasnodar v Ufa
Krylia Sovetov v Ural
Rostov v Zenit
Rubin Kazan v Terek Grozny
Spartak v Mordovia

APRIL 30, 2016
Dyn Moscow v Amkar Perm
FK Krasnodar v Anzhi
Loko Moscow v Spartak
Mordovia v Rostov
Terek Grozny v Krylia Sovetov
Ufa v Rubin Kazan
Ural v CSKA
Zenit v Kuban Krasnodar

MAY 6, 2016
Amkar Perm v Ural
Anzhi v Zenit
CSKA v Terek Grozny
Krylia Sovetov v Ufa
Kuban Krasnodar v Mordovia
Rostov v Loko Moscow
Rubin Kazan v FK Krasnodar
Spartak v Dyn Moscow

MAY 10, 2016
Dyn Moscow v Rostov
FK Krasnodar v Krylia Sovetov
Loko Moscow v Kuban Krasnodar
Mordovia v Zenit
Rubin Kazan v Anzhi
Terek Grozny v Amkar Perm
Ufa v CSKA
Ural v Spartak

MAY 13, 2016
Amkar Perm v Ufa
Anzhi v Mordovia
CSKA v FK Krasnodar
Krylia Sovetov v Rubin Kazan
Kuban Krasnodar v Dyn Moscow
Rostov v Ural
Spartak v Terek Grozny
Zenit v Loko Moscow

MAY 21, 2016
Dyn Moscow v Zenit
FK Krasnodar v Amkar Perm
Krylia Sovetov v Anzhi
Loko Moscow v Mordovia
Rubin Kazan v CSKA
Terek Grozny v Rostov
Ufa v Spartak
Ural v Kuban Krasnodar

(All dates subject to change)

Champions raid Dundee United again

When Celtic used Gary Mackay-Steven and Stuart Armstrong as two of the poster boys for the launch of this season's new green away strip, Dundee United fans joked that it was "good to see what our B team is wearing this season".

A sense of irony is needed by fans of the east-coast club right now as the sale of their two best assets, for £2million to the champions last February, killed a promising campaign for United.

In March, Jackie McNamara's side lost the Scottish League Cup Final to Celtic, with Mackay-Steven and Armstrong sitting ineligible in the Hampden Park stand, having played for United in the competition. Celtic then knocked United out of the Scottish Cup, after which a slump in league form saw McNamara's one-time pacesetters finish fifth and miss out on Europe.

And to rub salt into the wounds on Tayside, on the same day that Mackay-Steven and Armstrong were fronting Celtic's kit launch, United's Nadir Ciftci was being unveiled as yet another new signing by the Glasgow club.

While his club might have received £1.5m for a player McNamara unearthed for nothing, there was little comfort in knowing that the 23-year-old Turkish striker may well come back to haunt his former club this season.

The United manager had declared his desire to

Sold...Gary Mackay-Steven and Stuart Armstrong are the latest to leave Tannadice for Celtic

KEY DATES
The season started August 1 and finishes on the weekend of May 14/15.

Last season's top two meet at Aberdeen on September 12 and Celtic on October 31.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP 2015-16

1 Aberdeen
2 Celtic *(Glasgow)*
Partick Thistle
3 Dundee
Dundee United
4 Hamilton
5 Hearts *(Edinburgh)*
6 Inverness Caledonian Thistle
7 Kilmarnock
8 Motherwell
9 Ross County *(Dingwell)*
10 St Johnstone *(Perth)*

Losing battle...Dundee United boss McNamara

see Cifti move to England, rather than Celtic – the club that McNamara himself served as a player for 10 years. The Tannadice board even accepted an offer from Wigan Athletic, only for Ciftci to reject the deal and insist on moving to Celtic.

European football was undoubtedly the lure for Ciftci, who McNamara found in Holland after he was released by NAC Breda. The player received a glowing endorsement from ex-Celtic striker Chris Sutton – whose £6m move from Chelsea is still the club's joint-record fee – as "a shrewd piece of business in the current financial climate".

Because of the constraints of Dundee United's selling policy, McNamara has lost 11 players, from Johnny Russell (Derby County) and Andrew Robertson (Hull City) to Ryan Gauld (Sporting Lisbon) in the last two years.

United earned £6m from the sale of Gauld and Robertson, while Russell netted just £800,000 – but at least he was kept out of the reach of Celtic, who were interested. There was no such luck with Ciftci. Or Mackay-Steven. Or Armstrong.

McNamara is not the first Dundee United boss wanting the club to sell to England rather than Glasgow. Jim McLean insisted on it during the 1980s, when United were Scottish champions and one of the best sides in Europe.

McLean refused to sell Richard Gough – who was part of United's 1983 league title side – to Rangers in 1986, transferring the centre-back to Tottenham Hotspur for £750,00 instead. Gough went on to captain Spurs in a FA Cup Final, only for Rangers to buy him for £1m in late 1987.

Kevin Gallacher's goals helped Dundee United reach the 1987 UEFA Cup Final and again McLean resisted offers from Celtic – where Gallacher's grandfather, Patsy, was a club legend – and sold him to Coventry City for £1m in 1990. Gallacher went on to partner Sutton when Blackburn Rovers became English champions.

The only time McLean had to accept defeat was in 1993, when Duncan Ferguson moved from Tannadice to Rangers – but that was because they paid a then-British record fee of £4m.

Those days are long gone, with Celtic the only side in Scotland's top flight paying transfer fees, but at least the champions are re-circulating money around the domestic market – the other 11 teams also receive cash from UEFA based on Celtic's progress in Europe.

Manager Ronny Deila's conversion to buying "local" talent means the £1.5m for Ciftci is less of a risk than the £7m wasted on strikers from abroad, with Teemu Pukki (Brondby), Amido Balde (Metz) and Mo Bangura (Istanbul BB and now AIK) all offloaded at a huge loss.

Phil Gordon

> "A shrewd piece of business by Celtic in the current financial climate"
>
> **Chris Sutton on the signing of Nadir Ciftci (right)**

ONES TO WATCH

DEDRYCK BOYATA *(Celtic)*
The Belgian defender cost £1.5m from Manchester City and will thrive if he copies compatriot Jason Denayer's form there last term.

BLAZEJ AUGUSTYN *(Hearts)*
Defender signed from Gornik. Played in Serie A with Catania and his model wife, Monia, saw the pair dubbed Poland's "Posh and Becks".

GRAEME SHINNIE *(Aberdeen)*
Back in his native city after six impressive years at Inverness, the 24-year-old is Scotland's best left-back.

RYAN CHRISTIE *(Inverness)*
Scotland's young player of the year last season, and if the skilful midfielder keeps up his progress he will be on a bigger stage soon.

JULEN ETXABEGUREN *(Dundee)*
In Real Sociedad's 2013-14 Champions League squad, then swapped football for university, but now signed from East Fife.

TALKING POINTS

- Back in the top flight after finishing 20 points ahead of Hibernian and Rangers, can Hearts maintain their upward mobility? Director of football Craig Levein has had to caution rising expectation levels of Edinburgh fans who feel Robbie Neilson's side might challenge Celtic.
- Second for the past two years and with more than 10,000 season tickets sold at Pittodrie, can Derek McInnes take Aberdeen to the next level and add the title to the 2014 Scottish League Cup?
- With Sunderland among the Dutch centre-back's admirers, will Virgil Van Dijk still be at Celtic when the summer transfer window ends?
- After last term's Scottish Cup success and this year's European debut, can Inverness Caledonian Thistle prove they are no one-season wonders?
- Is Mark Warburton the right man for Rangers job? The Englishman oversaw promotion at Brentford and must now do the same at Ibrox. It will take him some time to assess the Scottish scene, but he does have David Weir as his assistant.

Rangers roles...Warburton (left) and Weir

Bartomeu wins election on back of Barca treble

There was no game at Camp Nou, but 47,270 people still turned up one Saturday in July anyway. It was election day in Catalonia, the chance to vote for FC Barcelona's new president, and so they came – starting with coach Luis Enrique, who arrived six minutes after the polling booths opened. Asked a few days before if he planned to exercise his right to vote as a member and if he knew who he would be voting for, he responded succinctly: "Yes and yes."

He was not alone. Xavi also came, as did Carles Puyol and Gerard Pique. Johan Cruyff voted, although the man he supported, former president Joan Laporta, did not emerge victorious. Instead, the winner was Josep Maria Bartomeu. The outgoing president, under whom Barcelona won the league, Spanish Cup and Champions League treble, is back in power for the next six years.

Bartomeu had been Barcelona's president for 18 months, having taken over from Sandro Rosell, who was forced to resign over the scandal surrounding the Neymar signing. That ended with Rosell and Bartomeu both charged with fraud, but while it cost the former his post it did not stop the latter from taking over without having to go to the polls – and nor, ultimately, winning the elections comfortably.

With the club seemingly in crisis at the turn of the year, elections were called in January, with Bartomeu insisting he had done so "to reduce the tension around the club". By July, Barca had won everything and the panorama had changed entirely.

Bartomeu had looked to be in a weak position, his reign certain to end, but he managed the crisis well and used the interim period to strengthen his electoral position. Slowly, the team improved, ending with victory in Berlin. Now his mandate is an extremely strong one.

Of a total electorate of 109,637 only 47,270 members voted. At 43 per cent that may sound low, but the turnout was actually considered to be quite good, not least with elections happening in July, at a time when many Barca supporters are out of the city, and on a hot day in the school holidays when those who are in the city have better plans. There is no provision for proxy voting or postal votes.

Bartomeu polled 54.63 per cent of the vote, while Laporta, who was president between 2003 and 2010, polled 33.03 per cent. Agusti Benedito ended with 7.16 per cent and Toni Freixa 3.7 per cent. All four men had been part of the same team that swept to victory under Laporta in 2003, but divisions had opened up, paralleling the historic divide that has beset Barcelona for three decades.

Poll...Xavi casts his vote

Laporta and Rosell had been president and vice-president, but their relationship ended in bitterness and recrimination; in hatred, in fact. Rosell then won elections in 2010, the most voted-for president in the club's history, with Bartomeu as his vice-president. When Bartomeu took over, the tone softened, and there was little doubt that he was more likeable than his predecessor, but the divide remained palpable. Played out through the press, it was often nasty too.

Benedito had been there in 2003 under Laporta, albeit not on the board, and had been the first to leave, although ideologically he is reasonably close to Laporta. Freixa had been there too, and was later the board's spokesman under Rosell and Bartomeu, but he had complained the board had been bypassed, decisions taken unilaterally, and now he was going it alone. Laporta accused him of being Bartomeu's "submarine" but Freixa called himself a "third way". Benedito complained of a "civil war" that would not end if Laporta or Bartomeu won.

Horizontal look... Barcelona have change their kit for 2015-16

When Bartomeu won, he insisted that "together" Barcelona would be stronger. Whether that unity is lasting, or even sought, remains to be seen. With 75 per cent of the votes counted, Laporta left, not waiting for the final result. "Never surrender," he insisted. In the end, the treble had, quite naturally, proved decisive.

"Fans are happy," Bartomeu said, putting it in simple terms. An electorate by nature fairly conservative was still less likely to deliver a revolution after such success.

Bartomeu's campaign had been a cautious, defensive one, in which he avoided direct confrontations, agreeing to go to only one debate. "When he was president he acted like a candidate, now that he is a candidate he acts like he is ▸

PROMOTED TEAMS

REAL BETIS
One of the country's best-supported clubs are back and they'll be welcomed too. Their promotion was never really in doubt and they have been reasonably active in the summer, with Rafael Van der Vaart (above) their star signing.

LAS PALMAS
Back for the first time since 2002, they returned via the play-offs, coming from behind to beat Zaragoza on away goals. It was impossible not to be delighted for their coach Paco Herrera and veteran playmaker Juan Carlos Valeron.

SPORTING GIJON
Promotion was an enormous achievement for a young squad led by Abelardo. Unable to sign reinforcements, they are likely to struggle, but their fans are among the best and have huge faith.

NEW COACHES

RAFA BENITEZ
(Real Madrid)
Born in Madrid, grew up in Madrid, schooled in Madrid, went to university in Madrid, married in Madrid, did military service in Madrid, played for Madrid at youth team level, and coached Madrid B, before briefly becoming assistant coach with Vicente Del Bosque. Now, 21 years later, he is Madrid's main man.

FRAN ESCRIBA
(Getafe)
Assistant coach with Quique Sanchez Flores at Getafe and then Atletico Madrid, and the man often credited with their defensive and tactical success, he did a superb job at Elche last season. He's now back at the Coliseum.

JOSE LUIS MENDILIBAR
(Eibar)
Gaizka Garitano resigned from Eibar because he had not kept the team up – only for them to then be reinstated. His replacement is a man who likes his teams to play aggressive, physical football with a very high line.

SPANISH LA LIGA 2015-16

1 Athletic Bilbao
2 Atletico Madrid *(Madrid)*
Getafe
Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid
3 Barcelona *(Barcelona)*
Espanyol
4 Celta Vigo
5 Deportivo La Coruna
6 Eibar
7 Granada
8 Las Palmas
9 Levante (*Valencia*)
Valencia
10 Malaga
11 Real Betis *(Seville)*
Sevilla
12 Real Sociedad *(San Sebastian)*
13 Sporting Gijon
14 Villarreal

the president," Benedito had complained. Bartomeu's campaign could be summed up in two words he used often: "trident" and "treble". Neymar, Suarez and Messi; league, cup and European Cup; both are strong hands to play – even if the opposition sought to present the success as coming in spite of Bartomeu rather than because of him, while Laporta tried to claim "ownership" of Messi.

At an institutional level, there are key issues that still need to be handled, from the Neymar case to the FIFA transfer ban; from the UEFA investigation over the Catalan independence flags unfurled at the Champions League Final to the rocketing salaries, which account for almost 80 per cent of the budget; from redevelopment of the stadium to the shirt sponsorship with Qatar – an emotive issue during the campaign. There was also much debate over Barcelona's economic stagnation and their debt (estimated at around €300million), as well as the apparently declining significance of La Masia, the youth academy.

As for the first team, there were still debates, but this was an atypical campaign: the candidates came with their own sporting directors and there were some debates about signings, but the FIFA ban lessened the impact of those promises and rather than promising certain coaches, all four candidates said that they would continue with Luis Enrique. The coach's contract had been renewed by Bartomeu just before he was forced to step down as the electoral period opened.

Continuity won out. The question now is: will Barcelona's success continue?

Two signings have already been made. Aleix Vidal arrived from Sevilla and can play at right-back or on the right side of midfield. Arda Turan came from Atletico Madrid in a deal set up by Bartomeu but finalised by the interim committee which oversaw the day-to-day running of club during elections. Xavi, meanwhile, has departed, of course.

Unlike at Real Madrid – who are under new management with Rafa Benitez, have lost Iker Casillas, are still trying to sign another striker, have to restructure the team and maybe move Gareth Bale in to middle, and who are still pursuing David De Gea – it appears unlikely that there will be any other major changes at Barcelona. Continuity is the ley but continuing their success will not be simple.

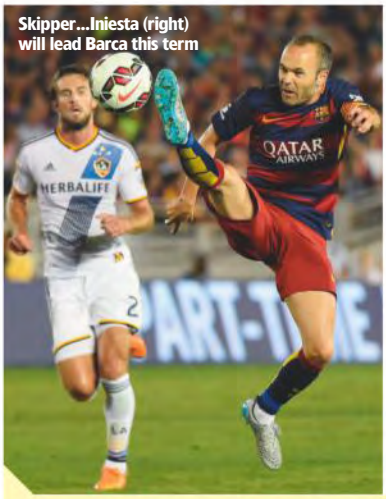
It is no secret they want Paul Pogba, but that is more likely to be a move for next year. Pedro may yet depart as he renewed his contract but the buyout clause dropped considerably. He admits he has had offers and that he has doubts over his future. When you have Messi, Neymar and Suarez ahead of you, you know that your opportunities will be few. Barcelona will allow him to decide. "I hope he stays, but..." admitted Luis Enrique.

A couple of days after the elections, Barcelona headed off to the USA for pre-season training, minus the players who played at the Copa America: Bravo, Neymar, Alves, Mascherano and Messi. "Leo needs a rest," Luis Enrique said.

The team will play just two friendlies before the league campaign gets going – and once it starts, it won't let up. It may not be the ideal preparation for a long season that will end with the European Championship. The challenge is the six trophies won by Pep Guardiola's side five years ago.

Turan and Vidal will not be available because the FIFA ban means they can't play for Barcelona until the winter window opens in January. But fortunately for Barca, and for Bartomeu, it's already an impressive team. A treble-winning team and an election-winning team too.

Sid Lowe



Skipper...Iniesta (right) will lead Barca this term

> "We've made it clear. The team is complete"
>
> **Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu speaking on the club's pre-season tour**

Pre-season...Real Madrid's Nacho blocks a Roma attack

Challenge...Real Madrid's Marcelo is challenged by Yaya Toure of Manchester City in the International Champions Cup in Melbourne

TALKING POINTS

- At the end of last season, Elche survived and Eibar were relegated. Then the league sent Elche down and reinstated Eibar because of the former's financial problems, with the high court upholding Elche's sentence. Not for the first time, Spanish football is a bit messy.
- Carlos Bacca has gone to Milan, but Sevilla's sporting director Monchi has, as ever, been hugely active in the transfer market and has a habit of succeeding.
- Fernando Torres, Jackson Martinez, Luciano Vietto, Antoine Griezmann and Yannick Ferreira-Carrasco might just

represent the best attacking line Atletico Madrid have ever had.

● Under Peter Lim, Valencia are back in the Champions League and flexing their financial muscle. Last year they benefited from having no European competition; how will they do this season with games every four days?

● Phil Neville has thrown himself into his role as assistant coach at Valencia and is working hard at learning Spanish. Will other Englishmen follow his example?

● Villarreal may have lost Denis Cheryshev, who returned to Real Madrid after last season's loan, but they retain a stability of which most clubs can only dream.

Recruit...Martinez

● Javi Gracia worked wonders at reviving Malaga while bringing through youth. But as the exodus of talent continues, how long can he keep producing?

● Last season Fran Escriba led Elche to a survival that was eventually taken away from them. Now back at Getafe, where he was assistant coach to Quique Sanchez Flores, things won't be much easier.

● One of Real Sociedad's problems last season was they were simply not fit. With a pre-season under his belt, coach David Moyes should now have got what he wants.

ONES TO WATCH

FERNANDO TORRES
(Atletico Madrid)
"The Kid" had a hero's welcome on his return last season but his role was limited. Now in the number nine shirt, he looks fitter.

CRISTIANO RONALDO
(Real Madrid)
A key issue for Rafa Benitez is Ronaldo, who is evolving into a centre-forward, so is it time to reinforce that shift?

CIRO IMMOBILE
(Sevilla)
Just three goals for Borussia Dortmund, but 22 the season before that for Torino. Will the move to La Liga get the best from him?

ARDA TURAN
(Barcelona)
Not available to play until January, he posseses great skill and is hugely enjoyable to watch. Can he now do it at Camp Nou?

LIONEL MESSI
(Barcelona)
Few players have been as good to watch. Off the back of a historic, tumultuous season, then the Copa America, how will he respond this term?

GARETH BALE
(Real Madrid)
Could he become Madrid's main man? Benitez is keen to move him from the right and give him freedom behind the striker.

SAMU GARCIA
(Villarreal)
One of the most intriguing, and quick summer deals, took him to Villarreal from Malaga. An exciting 25-year-old who is extremely talented.

SAMU CASTILLEJO
(Villarreal)
Villarreal's second Samu signing of the summer, also from Malaga, is a 20-year-old winger with caps for Spain's under-21s.

MICHAEL KROHN-DEHLI
(Sevilla)
The Danish midfielder was a free transfer from Celta Vigo. Understated but vital, he may prove to be a superb addition.

JOSE ANTONIO REYES
(Sevilla)
At 31 years of age, his best days may be behind him, but the ex-Arsenal winger remains great fun to watch.

Target...Real's Karim Benzema is in demand

Painful...Paco Alcacer of Valencia tumbles under a challenge from Villarreal's Moi Gomez

FIXTURES

23 AUGUST, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Barcelona
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Las Palmas**
Deportivo La Coruna	v	Real Sociedad
Espanyol	**v**	**Getafe**
Granada	v	Eibar
Levante	**v**	**Celta Vigo**
Malaga	v	Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano	**v**	**Valencia**
Real Betis	v	Villarreal
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Real Madrid**

AUGUST 30, 2015

Barcelona	v	Malaga
Celta Vigo	**v**	**Rayo Vallecano**
Eibar	v	Athletic Bilbao
Getafe	**v**	**Granada**
Las Palmas	v	Levante
Real Madrid	**v**	**Real Betis**
Real Sociedad	v	Sporting Gijon
Sevilla	**v**	**Atletico Madrid**
Valencia	v	Deportivo La Coruna
Villarreal	**v**	**Espanyol**

SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Getafe
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Barcelona**
Celta Vigo	v	Las Palmas
Espanyol	**v**	**Real Madrid**
Granada	v	Villarreal
Levante	**v**	**Sevilla**
Malaga	v	Eibar
Rayo Vallecano	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**
Real Betis	v	Real Sociedad
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Valencia**

SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Barcelona	v	Levante
Deportivo La Coruna	**v**	**Sporting Gijon**
Eibar	v	Atletico Madrid
Getafe	**v**	**Malaga**
Las Palmas	v	Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid	**v**	**Granada**
Real Sociedad	v	Espanyol
Sevilla	**v**	**Celta Vigo**
Valencia	v	Real Betis
Villarreal	**v**	**Athletic Bilbao**

SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Real Madrid
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Getafe**
Celta Vigo	v	Barcelona
Espanyol	**v**	**Valencia**
Granada	v	Real Sociedad
Las Palmas	**v**	**Sevilla**
Levante	v	Eibar
Malaga	**v**	**Villarreal**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Sporting Gijon
Real Betis	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Barcelona	v	Las Palmas
Deportivo La Coruna	**v**	**Espanyol**
Eibar	v	Celta Vigo
Getafe	**v**	**Levante**
Real Madrid	v	Malaga
Real Sociedad	**v**	**Athletic Bilbao**
Sevilla	v	Rayo Vallecano
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Real Betis**
Valencia	v	Granada
Villarreal	**v**	**Atletico Madrid**

OCTOBER 4, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Valencia
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Real Madrid**
Celta Vigo	v	Getafe
Espanyol	**v**	**Sporting Gijon**
Granada	v	Deportivo La Coruna
Las Palmas	**v**	**Eibar**
Levante	v	Villarreal
Malaga	**v**	**Real Sociedad**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Real Betis
Sevilla	**v**	**Barcelona**

OCTOBER 18, 2015

Barcelona	v	Rayo Vallecano
Deportivo La Coruna	**v**	**Athletic Bilbao**
Eibar	v	Sevilla
Getafe	**v**	**Las Palmas**
Real Betis	v	Espanyol
Real Madrid	**v**	**Levante**
Real Sociedad	v	Atletico Madrid
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Granada**
Valencia	v	Malaga
Villarreal	**v**	**Celta Vigo**

OCTOBER 25, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Sporting Gijon
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Valencia**
Barcelona	v	Eibar
Celta Vigo	**v**	**Real Madrid**
Granada	v	Real Betis
Las Palmas	**v**	**Villarreal**
Levante	v	Real Sociedad
Malaga	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Espanyol
Sevilla	**v**	**Getafe**

OCTOBER 28, 2015

Deportivo La Coruna	v	Atletico Madrid
Eibar	**v**	**Rayo Vallecano**
Espanyol	v	Granada
Getafe	**v**	**Barcelona**
Real Betis	v	Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid	**v**	**Las Palmas**
Real Sociedad	v	Celta Vigo
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Malaga**
Valencia	v	Levante
Villarreal	**v**	**Sevilla**

NOVEMBER 1, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Espanyol
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Sporting Gijon**
Barcelona	v	Villarreal
Celta Vigo	**v**	**Valencia**
Eibar	v	Getafe
Las Palmas	**v**	**Real Sociedad**
Levante	v	Deportivo La Coruna
Malaga	**v**	**Real Betis**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Granada
Sevilla	**v**	**Real Madrid**

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

Deportivo La Coruna	v	Celta Vigo
Espanyol	**v**	**Malaga**
Getafe	v	Rayo Vallecano
Granada	**v**	**Athletic Bilbao**
Real Betis	v	Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid	**v**	**Barcelona**
Real Sociedad	v	Sevilla
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Levante**
Valencia	v	Las Palmas
Villarreal	**v**	**Eibar**

NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Atletico Madrid	v	Espanyol
Barcelona	**v**	**Real Sociedad**
Celta Vigo	v	Sporting Gijon
Eibar	**v**	**Real Madrid**
Getafe	v	Villarreal
Las Palmas	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**
Levante	v	Real Betis
Malaga	**v**	**Granada**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Athletic Bilbao
Sevilla	**v**	**Valencia**

NOVEMBER 29, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Malaga
Deportivo La Coruna	**v**	**Sevilla**
Espanyol	v	Levante
Granada	**v**	**Atletico Madrid**
Real Betis	v	Celta Vigo
Real Madrid	**v**	**Getafe**
Real Sociedad	v	Eibar
Sporting Gijon	**v**	**Las Palmas**
Valencia	v	Barcelona
Villarreal	**v**	**Rayo Vallecano**

DECEMBER 6, 2015

Atletico Madrid	v	Athletic Bilbao
Barcelona	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**
Celta Vigo	v	Espanyol
Eibar	**v**	**Valencia**
Getafe	v	Real Sociedad
Las Palmas	**v**	**Real Betis**
Levante	v	Granada
Rayo Vallecano	**v**	**Malaga**
Sevilla	v	Sporting Gijon
Villarreal	**v**	**Real Madrid**

DECEMBER 13, 2015

Athletic Bilbao	v	Levante
Deportivo La Coruna	**v**	**Eibar**
Espanyol	v	Las Palmas
Granada	**v**	**Celta Vigo**
Malaga	v	Atletico Madrid
Real Betis	**v**	**Sevilla**
Real Madrid	v	Rayo Vallecano
Real Sociedad	**v**	**Villarreal**
Sporting Gijon	v	Barcelona
Valencia	**v**	**Getafe**

DECEMBER 20, 2015

Barcelona	v	Real Betis
Celta Vigo	**v**	**Athletic Bilbao**
Eibar	v	Sporting Gijon
Getafe	**v**	**Deportivo La Coruna**
Las Palmas	v	Granada
Levante	**v**	**Malaga**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid	**v**	**Real Sociedad**
Sevilla	v	Espanyol
Villarreal	**v**	**Valencia**

JANUARY 3, 2016

Athletic Bilbao	v	Las Palmas
Atletico Madrid	**v**	**Levante**
Deportivo La Coruna	v	Villarreal
Espanyol	**v**	**Barcelona**
Granada	v	Sevilla
Malaga	**v**	**Celta Vigo**
Rayo Vallecano	v	Real Sociedad
Real Betis	**v**	**Eibar**
Sporting Gijon	v	Getafe
Valencia	**v**	**Real Madrid**

Battering ram... Inigo Martinez of Real Sociedad takes on Getafe

Power...Atletico Madrid's Raul Jimenez beats Celta Vigo keeper Sergio Alvarez

JANUARY 10, 2016

Barcelona v Granada
Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid
Eibar v Espanyol
Getafe v Real Betis
Las Palmas v Malaga
Levante v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna
Real Sociedad v Valencia
Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao
Villarreal v Sporting Gijon

JANUARY 17, 2016

Barcelona v Athletic Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Levante
Eibar v Granada
Getafe v Espanyol
Las Palmas v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Sporting Gijon
Real Sociedad v Deportivo La Coruna
Sevilla v Malaga
Valencia v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Real Betis

JANUARY 24, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Eibar
Atletico Madrid v Sevilla
Deportivo La Coruna v Valencia
Espanyol v Villarreal
Granada v Getafe
Levante v Las Palmas
Malaga v Barcelona
Rayo Vallecano v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Real Madrid
Sporting Gijon v Real Sociedad

JANUARY 31, 2016

Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
Deportivo La Coruna v Rayo Vallecano
Eibar v Malaga
Getafe v Athletic Bilbao
Las Palmas v Celta Vigo
Real Madrid v Espanyol
Real Sociedad v Real Betis
Sevilla v Levante
Valencia v Sporting Gijon
Villarreal v Granada

FEBRUARY 7, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal
Atletico Madrid v Eibar
Celta Vigo v Sevilla
Espanyol v Real Sociedad
Granada v Real Madrid
Levante v Barcelona
Malaga v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Las Palmas
Real Betis v Valencia
Sporting Gijon v Deportivo La Coruna

FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Barcelona v Celta Vigo
Deportivo La Coruna v Real Betis
Eibar v Levante
Getafe v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Real Sociedad v Granada
Sevilla v Las Palmas
Sporting Gijon v Rayo Vallecano
Valencia v Espanyol
Villarreal v Malaga

FEBRUARY 21, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad
Atletico Madrid v Villarreal
Celta Vigo v Eibar
Espanyol v Deportivo La Coruna
Granada v Valencia
Las Palmas v Barcelona
Levante v Getafe
Malaga v Real Madrid
Rayo Vallecano v Sevilla
Real Betis v Sporting Gijon

FEBRUARY 28, 2016

Barcelona v Sevilla
Deportivo La Coruna v Granada
Eibar v Las Palmas
Getafe v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid
Real Sociedad v Malaga
Sporting Gijon v Espanyol
Valencia v Athletic Bilbao
Villarreal v Levante

MARCH 2, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Deportivo La Coruna
Atletico Madrid v Real Sociedad
Celta Vigo v Villarreal
Espanyol v Real Betis
Granada v Sporting Gijon
Las Palmas v Getafe
Levante v Real Madrid
Malaga v Valencia
Rayo Vallecano v Barcelona
Sevilla v Eibar

MARCH 6, 2016

Deportivo La Coruna v Malaga
Eibar v Barcelona
Espanyol v Rayo Vallecano
Getafe v Sevilla
Real Betis v Granada
Real Madrid v Celta Vigo
Real Sociedad v Levante
Sporting Gijon v Athletic Bilbao
Valencia v Atletico Madrid
Villarreal v Las Palmas

MARCH 13, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Real Betis
Atletico Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna
Barcelona v Getafe
Celta Vigo v Real Sociedad
Granada v Espanyol
Las Palmas v Real Madrid
Levante v Valencia
Malaga v Sporting Gijon
Rayo Vallecano v Eibar
Sevilla v Villarreal

MARCH 20, 2016

Deportivo La Coruna v Levante
Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao
Getafe v Eibar
Granada v Rayo Vallecano
Real Betis v Malaga
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Real Sociedad v Las Palmas
Sporting Gijon v Atletico Madrid
Valencia v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Barcelona

APRIL 3, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Granada
Atletico Madrid v Real Betis
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Celta Vigo v Deportivo La Coruna
Eibar v Villarreal
Las Palmas v Valencia
Levante v Sporting Gijon
Malaga v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Getafe
Sevilla v Real Sociedad

APRIL 10, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano
Deportivo La Coruna v Las Palmas
Espanyol v Atletico Madrid
Granada v Malaga
Real Betis v Levante
Real Madrid v Eibar
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Sporting Gijon v Celta Vigo
Valencia v Sevilla
Villarreal v Getafe

APRIL 17, 2016

Atletico Madrid v Granada
Barcelona v Valencia
Celta Vigo v Real Betis
Eibar v Real Sociedad
Getafe v Real Madrid
Las Palmas v Sporting Gijon
Levante v Espanyol
Malaga v Athletic Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Villarreal
Sevilla v Deportivo La Coruna

APRIL 20, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid
Deportivo La Coruna v Barcelona
Espanyol v Celta Vigo
Granada v Levante
Malaga v Rayo Vallecano
Real Betis v Las Palmas
Real Madrid v Villarreal
Real Sociedad v Getafe
Sporting Gijon v Sevilla
Valencia v Eibar

APRIL 24, 2016

Atletico Madrid v Malaga
Barcelona v Sporting Gijon
Celta Vigo v Granada
Eibar v Deportivo La Coruna
Getafe v Valencia
Las Palmas v Espanyol
Levante v Athletic Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Real Madrid
Sevilla v Real Betis
Villarreal v Real Sociedad

MAY 1, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Celta Vigo
Atletico Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Deportivo La Coruna v Getafe
Espanyol v Sevilla
Granada v Las Palmas
Malaga v Levante
Real Betis v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Sporting Gijon v Eibar
Valencia v Villarreal

MAY 8, 2016

Barcelona v Espanyol
Celta Vigo v Malaga
Eibar v Real Betis
Getafe v Sporting Gijon
Las Palmas v Athletic Bilbao
Levante v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Valencia
Real Sociedad v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Granada
Villarreal v Deportivo La Coruna

MAY 15, 2016

Athletic Bilbao v Sevilla
Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo
Deportivo La Coruna v Real Madrid
Espanyol v Eibar
Granada v Barcelona
Malaga v Las Palmas
Rayo Vallecano v Levante
Real Betis v Getafe
Sporting Gijon v Villarreal
Valencia v Real Sociedad

(All dates subject to change)

Basle play it safe after Sousa

Basle have once again paid the price for domestic success, with a sixth straight Swiss championship costing the club their coach and two key players this summer. Paulo Sousa left to take charge of Fiorentina just 12 months into a three-year contract, while midfielder Fabian Frey and defender Fabian Schar signed for Mainz and Hoffenheim respectively.

Helped by Champions League windfalls, the club have become adept at rebuilding during the close season, although their dealings this time have been less inspiring than usual.

Poached from Thun, new coach Urs Fischer was a safety-first choice after Basle broke with their preference for German-speaking bosses by appointing Sousa last year. The Portuguese brought some innovative methods to the club but clearly had his eye on bigger things, and there had been rumours that he was on his way to Italy even before the season was over.

Fischer is Basle's fifth coach in six seasons, since Christian Gross ended his 10-year stint at the club during the 2008-09 campaign. Of those, Thorsten Fink was snapped up by Hamburg after winning two titles in as many seasons and Murat Yakin left for Spartak Moscow.

Fischer, on the other hand, has spent his entire playing and coaching career in Switzerland, and does not appear the type to go gallivanting off to foreign lands at the first opportunity.

"Urs Fischer is not going to use FC Basle as a springboard," says club president Bernhard Heusler.

"It is not our aim to sit here every year and present a new coach, but we are in a situation where we have attracted international attention."

A central defender in his playing days, Fischer's career was spent with St Gallen and FC Zurich, where he was also coach for two seasons before moving to Thun. However, his association with Basle's bitter rivals Zurich did not immediately endear him to supporters and his first day at his new club was greeted by a banner which read: "Fischer will never be one of us."

His signings have looked strangely unambitious so far and have included 27-year-old Icelandic midfielder Birkir Bjarnason from Italian Serie B side Pescara and veteran Austrian striker Marc Janko, who is reaching the end of a journeyman career which has taken him to Holland, Turkey and Australia. There was also a case of what the Italians call "reheated soup" as Basle brought back midfielder Zdravko Kuzmanovic, who left as a teenager in 2007 and went on to play for Fiorentina, Stuttgart and Internazionale.

> "Fischer will never be one of us"
> **Basle fans' banner directed at new coach Urs Fischer**

Any perceived Basle weakness will be seized upon by Young Boys and Zurich, who look to be their only real challengers. Young Boys pushed the champions all the way last time out despite a poor start to the season and were the league's biggest spenders during the summer, spending €6million on Benfica pair Miralem Sulejmani and Loris Benito.

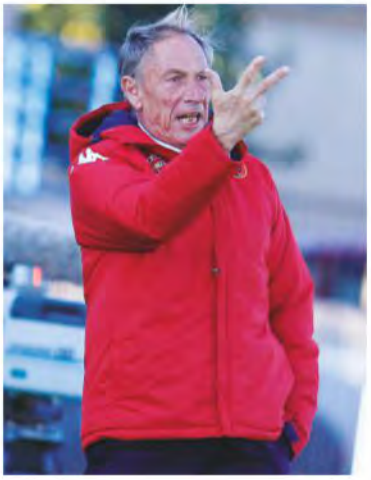
Meanwhile, the presence of Zdenek Zeman at promoted Lugano down south should add some much-needed spice.

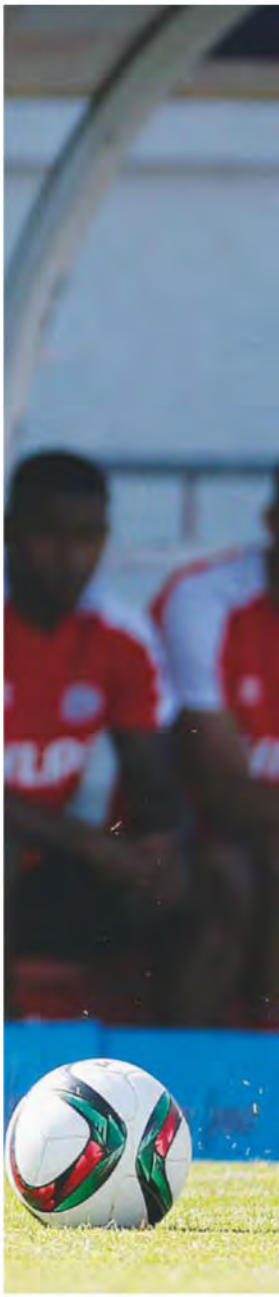
The Czech-born coach has taken his attacking philosophy to more than a dozen clubs in Italy with somewhat unpredictable results.

Sadly, at 68, he had an unhappy last season in Serie A with two stints at Cagliari. The first ended with him being sacked just before the halfway mark, and although he returned two months later he failed to lift the side and resigned.

Brian Homewood

Lugano recruit...Zdenek Zeman





TALKING POINTS

- Paulo Sousa could prove a hard act to follow after bringing a breath of fresh air to Basle and there maybe a sense with Urs Fischer that the club has slipped back into a more mundane routine.
- Ajax broke the Dutch transfer record when they paid €16million for Serbia's Miralem Sulejmani in 2008, but his career has stalled and he made only four league appearances for Benfica in an injury-plagued season last term. Will his €3m move to Young Boys get things back on track?
- Sion employed three coaches last season – which is about average for volatile club president Christian Constantin. Current boss Didier Tholot is in his third stint and probably has some credit after winning the Cup last season, but that could quickly be used up.

Third stint...Sion coach Didier Tholot

ONES TO WATCH

BREEL EMBOLO *(Basle)*
With 17 goals in his first full season last term, the Cameroon-born teenager opted to play for Switzerland and made his debut in March.

SHKELZEN GASHI *(Basle)*
The Swiss-born Albania striker has been the league's top scorer for the past two seasons, with Grasshoppers and then Basle.

MIRALEM SULEJMANI *(Young Boys)*
Ex-Partizan Belgrade, Ajax and Benfica winger now hoping to rediscover the form he showed earlier in his career.

KEY DATES
Season started on July 18 and will finish on May 25.

Key early games include
Basle v Zurich and Grasshoppers v Young Boys (both Aug 30).

Clash...Basle (in white) contest a pre-season friendly with PSV

MOUSSA KONATE *(Sion)*
Scored 22 goals in all competitions last season and caught the eye of several top English clubs. Scored five goals for Senegal at the 2012 Olympics.

YVON MVOGO *(Young Boys)*
Agile, commanding Cameroon-born goalkeeper who has not looked back since replacing the injured Marco Wolfli between the posts in 2013.

SWISS SUPER LEAGUE 2015-16

1 Basle
2 Grasshoppers *(Zurich)* Zurich
3 Lucerne
4 Lugano
5 Sion
6 St Gallen
7 Thun
8 Vaduz
9 Young Boys *(Berne)*

Big names bring renewed optimism

KEY DATES
Season starts on August 15 and will finish on May 21.

Key early games include
Besiktas v Trabzonspor (Sep 22) and Fenerbahce v Galatasaray (Oct 24).

With the Turkish Football Federation relaxing the rules so that clubs can now include 14 foreign players in their squad of 28, the big four have been digging deep to bring in some famous names.

Perhaps the most high-profile arrival is that of Dutch striker Robin Van Persie, who has joined Fenerbahce from Manchester United.

Remarkably, Fenerbahce are paying the 32-year-old a net wage of €4.9million a year in the hope that he can help them finish above arch-rivals Galatasaray and finally claim a place in the lucrative Champions League group stage.

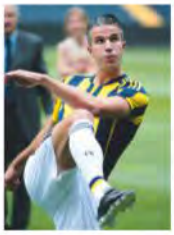
Fenerbahce president Aziz Yildirim has had to accept a UEFA ban and watch Gala

In at Trabzonspor...Shota Arveladze

TURKISH SUPER LIG 2015-16

1 Akhisar Belediyespor *(Manisa)*
2 Antalyaspor *(Antalya)*
3 Besiktas *(Istanbul)*
Fenerbahce
Galatasaray
Istanbul BB
Kasimpasa
4 Bursaspor *(Bursa)*
5 Caykur Rizespor *(Rize)*
6 Eskisehirspor *(Eskisehir)*
7 Gaziantepspor *(Gaziantep)*
8 Genclerbirligi *(Ankara)*
Osmanlıspor
9 Kayserispor *(Kayseri)*
10 Konyaspor *(Konya)*
11 Mersin
12 Sivasspor *(Sivas)*
13 Trabzonspor *(Trabzon)*

ONES TO WATCH



ROBIN VAN PERSIE *(Fenerbahce)*
The Dutchman is ready to regain his old form and his task will be to score the goals that take Fener to the Champions League group stage.

LUKAS PODOLSKI *(Galatasaray)*
Having spent time on the bench at Arsenal, then on loan with Internazionale, now is the time to show why he wears Germany's number 10 shirt.

RICARDO QUARESMA *(Besiktas)*
Back after a poor first spell at Besiktas, his first words on rejoining the club were: "I'm back to pay off my debts."

SAMUEL ETO'O *(Antalyaspor)*
Chased for a long time by the Istanbul clubs years ago but now hoping to shine for a small south coast side. Question is – is he still that good?

OZAN TUFAN *(Bursaspor)*
After snubbing big-club offers to stay in Bursa, this could be his season. Now is the time to show his class – for both club and country.

Welcome...Robin Van Persie greets Fenerbahce supporters

complete the domestic double last term, gaining their fourth star in the process for a record-breaking 20th league title. But with Van Persie and former United team-mate Nani joining a side already boasting Bruno Alves, Raul Meireles and Volkan Demirel, there is a real belief at the Sukru Saracoglu Stadium that they, too, can claim a 20th championship.

Perhaps the only question mark concerns how new coach Vitor Pereira will settle in after moving from Greece, where he was sacked by Olympiakos after winning the league.

Defending champions Galatasaray already have some stellar names such as Holland's Wesley Sneijder in their ranks, but they still brought in Germany striker Lukas Podolski from Arsenal.

"We are the champions, we can't buy a lot," says Gala coach Hamza Hamzaoglu. "We already have global star players, key figures, and we have to take the financial fairplay really seriously."

With Slaven Bilic having departed for West Ham United and the Premier League, Besiktas have brought in Senol Gunes as his replacement. With their new stadium almost finished and Ricardo Quaresma back on board, they will be hoping to cut the difference between themselves and last season's top two.

Finally, Trabzonspor have been busy in the transfer market, but their most interesting arrival was that of former player Shota Arveladze as their coach.

So, with some exciting new names coming in and some huge match-ups between the title contenders, other fans in Europe may continue to view Turkey as a thriving football country.

However, beyond the games between the big four, attendances remain worryingly low. Last season's average gate in the top flight was less than 7,000 – so let's hope the summer's big signings can entice fans back into the stadiums.

Mehmet Demircan

> "We have to take financial fairplay really seriously"
>
> **Galatasaray coach Hamza Hamzaoglu**

Signing...Nani has also joined Fenerbahce

TALKING POINTS

- Although in their thirties, Van Persie, Nani and Podolski are still in a class of their own. But while they are getting well paid, can these foreign stars help get Turkish football get back on track?
- Their new signings make Fenerbahce serious title contenders – but only if they can gel quickly and become a proper team.
- Galatasaray have progressed from the group stage of the Champions League in two of the last three seasons. But with a lack of activity in the transfer market, fans aren't too positive about this term's prospects.
- Senol Gunes' Bursaspor were known for their high-tempo football and a deluge of goals. Can he do the same for Besiktas?
- Shota Arveladze is Trabzonspor's fifth coach in two years. Will it be long before there's a sixth?

Another Euro campaign?... Galatasaray's Wesley Sneijder

Dynamo determined to defend their title

Having finally ended Shakhtar Donetsk's five-year monopoly of the domestic championship, Dynamo Kiev supremo Ihor Surkis has stayed true to his word and kept the majority of the side together for this season's defence of the title.

Austrian defender Aleksandar Dragovic, Portuguese midfielder Miguel Veloso and Ukraine striker Andriy Yarmolenko have all been retained, with Dutch forward Jeremain Lens (Sunderland) the only notable departure.

With a place in the group stage of the Champions League guaranteed, Dynamo have strengthened their squad with the acquisition of Ukraine international defender Mykola Morozyuk (Metalurh Donetsk), experienced Serbian midfielder Radosav Petrovic (Genclerbirligi), prolific Brazilian forward Junior Moraes (Metalurh Donetsk) and Paraguay winger Derlis Gonzalez (Basle).

"With the help of the new players, and our long-serving troops, we will do our best to reach the play-offs this season in the Champions League," says coach Serhiy Rebrov. "We have a great atmosphere in the dressing room and I hope it will help us to fulfil our ambitious task.

"Last season we started to play as a unit. All of our players selflessly fought and deserved victory in the championship and

KEY DATES
Season started on July 17 and will finish on May 14.

Key early games include
Dynamo Kiev v Shakhtar Donetsk *(Oct 16)*.

Double...Dynamo keeper Oleksandr Shovkovskiy lifts the Ukrainian Cup

UKRAINIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2015-16

1 Chornomorets (*Odessa*)
2 Dnipro (*Dnipropetrovsk*)
3 Dynamo Kiev
Olimpik Donetsk*
4 Hoverla (*Uzhhorod*)
5 Karpaty (*Lviv*)
Shakhtar Donetsk*
6 Metalist Kharkiv
7 Metalurh Zaporizhya
Zorya Luhansk*
8 Oleksandriya
9 Stal (*Dniprodzerzhynsk*)
10 Volyn Lutsk
11 Vorskla Poltava

(*team not playing in home city)

the Ukraine Cup. We have reached a good level in terms of discipline. I hope in the new season we will continue to develop."

Rebrov is equally optimistic about the game as a whole in the Ukraine, adding: "Despite the economic crisis, the biggest clubs in the country – such as Dynamo, Shakhtar and Dnipro – continue to evolve. Yes, we don't have players of Real Madrid and Barcelona's calibre, but we can achieve good results in Europe".

Shakhtar's hopes of regaining the title have not been helped by the loss of four of their Brazilian stars during the summer. A bid of €30million persuaded Shakhtar owner Rinat Akhmetov to export key midfielder Douglas Costa to Bayern Munich, while Luiz Adriano joined Milan. A another Serie A club, Sampdoria, snapped up powerful midfielder Fernando and midfielder Ilsinho returned home after his contract expired.

Despite being unable to train and play in their native Donetsk, and the mass exodus of foreign players, Shakhtar remain a well-organised club who will push Dynamo all the way.

"We are not a club of strangers, we are a Ukrainian club built by professionals dreaming about some achievements even in hard times," says Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu. "Last season was a shock for us. Nevertheless, we have learned a lot and received invaluable experience."

The club's Croatian skipper Darijo Srna adds: "The hardest thing is having to fly to Kiev, Lviv or whatever, but not to Donetsk. For years, after the game, we used to return there, to our houses and families. Now we are in rented flats.

"But we will stand; all will be well. This situation has made us stronger."

Meanwhile, Dnipro sold their best player, Yevhen Konoplyanka, to Sevilla in Spain – a move that can only damage their chances against Dynamo and Shakhtar.

Oleg Zadernovsky

> "Despite the economic crisis, the biggest clubs in the country – Dynamo, Shakhtar and Dnipro – continue to evolve"
>
> **Dynamo Kiev coach Serhiy Rebrov**

Strong...Shakhtar skipper Srna (far right) in Champions League action against Turkey's Fenerbahce

TALKING POINTS

- Jeremain Lens' speed and skill was an important facet of Dynamo Kiev's attack last season. They will almost certainly miss him this term.
- Shakhtar skipper Darijo Srna has been reported as saying that coach Mircea Lucescu will stay until the club returns to the Donbass Arena. But how long is that likely to be?
- Shakhtar may have a ready-made replacement for Douglas Costa in Marlos, but how will they make do without the prolific Luiz Adriano?
- After three fine seasons with Metalurh Donetsk, Brazilian forward Junior Moraes could be even better now he's with Dynamo.
- Finances remain a problem for some top-flight clubs and Hoverla, for example, were only able to participate in the league after being loaned 12 players by Dynamo.

Lucescu...staying

ONES TO WATCH

ANDRIY YARMOLENKO
(Dynamo Kiev)
A true leader of the reigning champions, he has excellent individual and team skills.

ALEX TEIXEIRA
(Shakhtar Donetsk)
Midfielder with a typically Brazilian touch who will lead the way for his compatriots at the club.

DARIJO SRNA
(Shakhtar Donetsk)
Croatian full-back who leads by example in every game. Now in his 13th season with the club.

ALEKSANDAR DRAGOVIC
(Dynamo Kiev)
Central defender who rejected offers from some of Europe's top clubs this summer.

NIKOLA KALINIC
(Dnipro)
Croatian forward blessed with good positioning and a finishing touch. Had two seasons with Blackburn Rovers.

Albania

Superliga

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The season starts on August 22 and ends on May 20. Early key matches include **Skenderbeu** v Kukesi (August 29).

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Former general secretary of the Albanian Football Association, Sulejman Starova, returns to Partizani Tirana for his second spell as coach. Shkelqim Muca has taken over at KF Tirana and Gugash Magani is in charge at Teuta Durres.

Bosnia

Premier League

By Sasa Ibrulj

KEY DATES

The season began on July 25 and after 18 rounds of games the winter break will start on November 7. The restart is planned for February 27, with the league ending on May 14. Zeljeznicar meet current champions FK Sarajevo on October 3, while Mostar-based clubs Velez and Zrinjski play each other on October 24.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

In the league where 15 of the 16 clubs made managerial changes during last season, the fact that there were no new appointments this summer was surprising. However, the practice of sacking coaches is a sort of tradition in Bosnia and it would be unusual if weren't any early casualties this term.

Croatia

Prva Liga

by Sasa Ibrulj

KEY DATES

The league started on July 10 and ends on May 14. **Dinamo and Hajduk** drew 1-1 in Zagreb on the opening weekend.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Hajduk replaced caretaker Hari Vukas with Damir Buric. It is the 51-year-old's first experience in charge, having spent 10 years in Germany as an assistant at Freiburg, Bayer Leverkusen and Werder Bremen.

Cyprus

First Division

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The season starts on August 22 and runs until May 22. The regular season consists of 26 rounds, followed by play-offs. Early games include Omonia v APOEL (November 11)

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Domingos Paciencia took over at champions APOEL following the sacking of Thorsten Fink in May. Pedro Emanuel, who has worked wonders on a small budget at Arouca, has taken charge of Apollon Limassol.

Czech Republic

First League

By Sam Beckwith

KEY DATES

The season started on August 1 and ends on May 14, with a winter break from November 30 to February 13. Key early games include Slavia Prague v Sparta Prague (September 26) and Viktoria Plzen v Sparta Prague (October 31).

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Despite missing out on the title last term, Sparta gave caretaker Zdenek Scasny a permanent contract. Slavia also have a new boss in Dusan Uhrin Jr, as do Liberec (Jindrich Trpisovsky), Teplice (David Vavruska) and Ostrava (Jaromir Kortytar).

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Backed by some of Albania's most successful businessmen, Skenderbeu have dominated the Superliga in recent times, winning five straight league titles. Kukesi have been second in each of the past three seasons, while Partizani Tirana are finally regaining their competitiveness after the ignominy of relegation in 2011.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Superliga rookies Terbuni Puke have been told that 1,950-capacity Ismail Xhemali Stadium is not fit for top-flight action and their squad requires a similar upgrade. Teuta came close to going down last term, losing almost three times as many games as they won.

ONE TO WATCH
Born in Serbia to Albanian parents, 22-year-old right-back Arbnor Fejzullahu of Partizani Tirana is rumoured to be interesting a number of Serie A sides. Made his debut for Albania in June.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Back on home soil after eight years piling up the goals in Austria, the USA, China and Israel, **Hamdi Salihi** should prove the perfect front-line focal point for reigning champions Skenderbeu.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
The quality of football in Bosnia is low, but the league is more competitive than any other in the region, with four different champions in last five years. **Vincent Tan**'s money has transformed Sarajevo, who are favourites.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
No one is safe this season as the whole league is one big relegation battle, with the top flight being reduced from 16 clubs to 12 – which means six will be relegated. In terms of quality, most of the clubs are more or less even.

ONE TO WATCH
With 15 goals and nine assists in 28 games, Riad Bajic was key to Zeljeznicar's unexpected second place last season. If the club can resist offers from abroad for the 21-year-old striker, he should be prolific once again.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Vincent Tan's investment allowed Sarajevo to bring in goalkeeper Matej Delac on loan from Chelsea and 24-year-old Nigerian midfielder Harmony Ikande, who was once on Milan's books.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Anyone other than Dinamo winning the title would be a huge surprise as they have been champions for the past 10 seasons. For last two, HNK Rijeka have established themselves as the second best, but they have little chance of toppling Dinamo.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Only one team is relegated, while another goes into a play-off. They are likely be from newcomers Inter Zapresic and last season's strugglers: Istra 1961, Slaven and Osijek. Many second-tier clubs fail to meet the licencing requirements and are denied promotion.

ONE TO WATCH
Despite big investment in imported players, Dinamo keep producing their own talent – and **Marko Pjaca** could be the next one to catch the eye of the big European clubs.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Marko Rog impressed last season for RNK Split after joining from minnows Varazdin and he has now been signed by Dinamo for €5m – the biggest-ever transfer fee between two Croatian clubs.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Victorious in the last three championships, APOEL remain the team to beat. No other side boasts as much talent, though they will miss Algerian striker Rafik Djebbour and German defensive midfielder Martin Lanig. AEK Larnaca have bought wisely this summer, while Apollon Limassol could improve on their third place.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Promoted to the top flight in May after finishing third in the second division, Aris Limassol are too good for the lower leagues but too weak to exist in the highest. Doxa Katokopias won just seven of their 32 games last term and only just avoided the drop.

ONE TO WATCH
During his two years at Anorthosis, teenager winger Andreas Makris has gone from strength to strength and it may well be that 2015-16 is his Cypriot football farewell tour prior to a move abroad.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Voted the best foreign player in the Cypriot elite last season, Brazilian winger Vander Vieira has left AEK Larnaca for APOEL. He was once on the books of top Rio side Flamengo.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Looks like a two-horse race between Viktoria Plzen, who have been champions for the last two seasons, and Sparta, the country's richest and historically most successful club. Big-spending Baumit Jablonec, who were third last time out, are dark horses.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
New boys Fastav Zlin were only promoted because the ground of runners-up Varnsdorf didn't meet requirements. The other promoted side, Sigma Olomouc, should be strong enough to avoid the drop. Zbrojovka Brno, Banik Ostrava and Slavia Prague could be drawn into a relegation battle, while Vysocina Jihlava look vulnerable.

ONE TO WATCH
Two and a half years after leaving for Slovan Liberec, 23-year-old midfielder Martin Frydek is back at Sparta after winning the cup last season and playing a prominent role in this summer's Euro Under-21 Championship.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Champions Viktoria Plzen's decision to trade forwards Stanislav Tecl and Tomas Wagner to title rivals Baumit Jablonec in exchange for 25-year-old wide midfielder Jan Kopic was eye-catching.

Hungary

NB I

By Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 17 to May 8, with a winter break between the weekends of December 13 and February 13. The derby games between **Ferencvaros** and Ujpest take place on September 12, December 13 and April 30.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Despite taking Videoton to the league title last season, coach Joan Carrillo was replaced by Bernard Casino, a Champions League winner with Marseille, presumably because of his European experience. After a decade at MTK, Jozsef Garami made way for former Hearts boss Csaba Laszlo.

Israel

Premier League

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The regular season runs from August 22 to March 5, followed by play-off groups. Key early games include Maccabi Haifa v Maccabi Tel Aviv (September 26) and the Tel Aviv derby Hapoel v Maccabi (October 31).

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

After taking Watford to the English Premier League, **Slavisa Jokanovic** took over at Maccabi Tel Aviv. Salah Hasarma joined Ironi Kiryat Shmona and Hapoel Tel Aviv appointed Cesar Mendiondo.

Macedonia

First League

By Milorad Stojmanovski

KEY DATES

The season started on August 9 and breaks on December 9. Although not yet confirmed, the winter break usually runs until the first weekend of March, with the season ending in May.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Elimination from the qualifying stage of the Champions League by APOEL of Cyprus saw Sergey Andreyev sacked by Vardar, with former sporting director Goce Sedloski – the only Macedonia to win 100 caps – taking over.

Malta

Premier League

By Domenic Aquilina

KEY DATES

The season kicks off on August 21 and will end on April 30. Hibernians and Birkirkara meet for the first time this season on October 25, with the return on February 14, before the league splits into championship and relegation pools.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

At the end of last season, Italian coach **Giovanni Tedesco** left Floriana and took charge of cup winners Birkirkara. Paul Zammit, who had led the side to the FA Trophy, was snapped up by Valletta.

Moldova

National division

By Miron Goihman

KEY DATES

The season began on July 25 and will finish on May 20, with a winter break from November 30 until March 5. The 10 teams play each other three times, with last season's champions Milsami entertaining runners-up Dacia on October 3.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Six of the 10 top-flight sides changed their man in charge this summer. Among the more high profile were **Lilian Popescu** joining Sherif and Stefan Stoica returning to Moldova with Zimbru.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Many expect Ferencvaros to put in a serious challenge and in June they beat Videoton 3-0 to win the Hungarian Super Cup. Defending champions Videoton have changed coach but should be too strong for most clubs. Could this be the year when Ujpest at last come good?

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Few reckon Bekescsaba have the squad to stay in the top flight, even with a stunted 12-team league. **Puskas Akademia** have enough political influence behind them to stay up, but the same can not be said of Vasas.

ONE TO WATCH
Still only 21, attacking midfielder Andras Rado was never going to stay at Haladas Szombathely – and the inevitable move to Ferencvaros in the close season may lead to a bigger club abroad if he fulfils his potential.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Escaping the chaos at Gyor, whose demise saw the recent champions relegated to the third flight, prolific striker Bence Mervo joined MTK after finishing as equal-top scorer at the Under-20 World Cup in New Zealand.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Champions for the past three seasons and treble winners last term, Maccabi Tel Aviv are obvious favourites and no other team in the country has their strength in depth or individual class. Ironi Kiryat Shmona should do well, along with Maccabi Haifa who boast playmaker Yossi Benayoun in their ranks.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Hapoel Acre have finished the regular season bottom in two of the last three seasons, only to pull themselves away from the brink in the play-off group. Now that Albanian striker Hamdi Salihi has returned to his homeland, Hapoel Haifa could also struggle.

ONE TO WATCH
Eran Zahavi of Maccabi Tel Aviv is a wonderful exponent of the false-nine role and is Israel's current player of the year, having emerged as the leading scorer for the last two seasons.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Still only 26, striker Ben Sahar joins Hapoel Be'er Sheva from Dutch side Willem II after spells in England, Spain, France and Germany. The word is that Sheva owner Alona Barkat broke the bank to get him.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Besides Vardar, who are the defending champions, and Shkendija, last season's cup winners Rabotnicki made an impressive start in the Europa League and could challenge despite losing key players.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
The small village team of Mladost Carev Dvor could struggle, along with Turnovo, Sileks and Metalurg. The fact that Shkendija, Renova, Mladost Carev Dvor, Metalurg and Bregalnica Stip will host games elsewhere due to reconstruction work at their own stadiums may have a bearing.

ONE TO WATCH
Twenty-year-old central defender Darko Velkovski moved from Rabotnicki to Vardar during the summer. He has already played over 100 league games and been capped by Macedonia.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Winger **Marjan Radeski** was signed by Shkendija from Metalurg for a Macedonian record fee of €140,000.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
The tussle for the title will undoubtedly be between Hibernians, Birkirkara and **Valletta**. Of the three, Birkirkara start as favourites.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
As always with promoted sides, newcomers Pembroke Athleta and St Andrews will have to produce their very best in order to keep their places in the elite division of Maltese football.

ONE TO WATCH
After a brief stint in Hungarian football last season with Dunaujvaros, Rowen Muscat has been in fine form since rejoining Birkirkara. At 24, he is a commanding figure in midfield for both club and country.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Signed from Lecce, **Fabrizio Miccoli** has already taken the local scene by storm, scoring the goal that beat West Ham United in the Europa League before they went out on penalties.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Milsami and Dacia were neck and neck last season and will be the teams to beat again, along with third-place Sherif. Former champions Zimbru will hope to mount a challenge, as will Zaria, who have ambitious new owners.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Newcomers Petrocub and Speranta could struggle, while Dinamo-Auto and Academia may also face a fight to avoid the drop. For teams such as Saxan, a lot will depend on the situation off the pitch, with several clubs having financial problems.

ONE TO WATCH
Eugeniu Cociuc is a 22-year-old midfielder with Dacia who has already made his debut for the national team and scored in this season's Europa League.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Sheriff snapped up 26-year-old striker Danijel Subotic from Qadsia of Kuwait. A Bosnian-born Switzerland under-19 international, he has also played in England, Belgium, Italy, Romania, Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

Montenegro

First League

by Dejan Panic

KEY DATES

The league starts on August 8 and has a winter break from December 6 to February 27. Each team plays each other home and away, followed by a third stage in which they play each other once more. The date of the last round of games is yet to be decided.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Nikola Rakojevic is back at Mladost, who he took to the third qualifying round of the Europa League two years ago. Buducnost appointed Miodrag Vukotic.

Northern Ireland

Premiership

by Roy Kitson

KEY DATES

The season started on August 8 and finishes at the end of April. Key early matches include Cliftonville v Crusaders (Sep), Crusaders v Linfield (Sept 12) and Cliftonville v Linfield (Oct 3)

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

There were no new managerial appointments in pre-season.

Serbia

Superliga

by Vladimir Novak

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 17 to April 10, followed by play-offs groups. **Red Star meet Partizan** in the Belgrade derby on September 12.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

After seven years in the Russian top flight, Montenegrin coach Miodrag Bozovic replaced Nenad Lalatovic at Red Star. The club's former player and coach Vladimir Petrovic took charge of OFK Belgrade – who began the new campaign at home to Red Star.

Slovakia

I Liga

by Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 18 until December 5, and after a winter break continues from February 27 until May 28. Champions Trencin visit their most likely main challengers, Slovan Bratislava, on September 19, and then host them in the first game of the new year.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

The only summer change saw newcomers Skalica dispense with Stefan Horny, the man who led the club to promotion, and bring in Ales Krecek.

Slovenia

PrvaLiga

by Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 17 until May 21, with a break between December 12 and February 2. The derby games between Maribor and Olimpija Ljubljana take place on October 24, March 5 and May 7.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

There were no big changes pre-season, but Marijan Pusnik's position at Olimpija must be in doubt, given the arrival of new owner **Milan Mandaric**.

Wales

Premier League

by Mel Thomas

KEY DATES

The first phase begins on August 21 and runs until January 17, when the top six and bottom six split into the championship and play-off groups.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

The big appointment over the summer was Gareth Owen taking over at Rhyl. Best known for his time at Wrexham, he played 350 league games and was capped by Wales at under-21 and B levels.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Rudar are favorites to retain their title, having managed to keep their key players and reinforce the side with new signings such as Petrovac striker Ivan Knezevic and attacking midfielder Drasko Bozovic from Sutjeska. Mladost, Sutjeska and Buducnost could challenge.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
The team that finishes last goes down, while those in 10th and 11th places go into the promotion/relegation play-offs. Iskra and Decic, who came up last season, are near the bottom, with Mornar.

ONE TO WATCH
With last season's top scorer Goran Vujovic (21 goals for Sutjeska) having joined Russian club Arsenal Tula, new Rudar signing Ivan Knezevic will be expected to head the goals list this time.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Former Red Star Belgrade and Serbia midfielder **Aleksandar Trisovic** has joined Zeta.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
The main contenders to take the title from Crusaders are Linfield, who have signed striker Guy Bates from Glenavon and central midfielder David Kee from Ballinamallard United. Also likely to be in contention are Cliftonville.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Hoping to avoid instant relegation will be promoted Carrick Rangers, who are back in the top flight after a gap of five years, Warrenpoint Town, who went to penalties in a relegation play-off, Dungannon Swifts and Ballinamallard United.

ONE TO WATCH

A bustling, 6ft 2in striker who has been vital to Crusaders' recent success, 26-year-old **Jordan Owens** specialises in power-packed, long-distance volleys.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Crusaders' chances of retaining the title are boosted by the arrival of midfielder/full-back Andrew Mitchell. The 23-year-old played in Scotland for Rangers and Annan Athletic before moving back home to Northern Ireland.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
As ever, there are only two serious contenders for the league title. Partizan and Red Star both signed better foreigners than last year and will feel they are stronger than last season, so the title race promises to be interesting.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
The three promoted clubs – Javor Ivanjica, Metalac and Radnik Surdulica – all face a battle to retain their top-flight status, as do Borac Cacak and Vozdovac – a club whose small stadium is on the roof of a Belgrade shopping mall!

ONE TO WATCH
Partizan's 19-year-old winger **Andrija Zivkovic** won the Under-20 World Cup with Serbia in the summer.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Having played for Ternana in Italy's second tier last season, the career of Bulgaria's 29-year-old Valeri Bojinov may be in a decline, but the ex Fiorentina, Juventus and Manchester City striker is a big reinforcement for champions Partizan.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Slovan Bratislava missed out on a third consecutive title last term and should have brought in enough new blood to set the record straight.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Podbrezova only stayed up because of Kosice's financial demise, while little is expected of second-tier champions Zemplin Michalovce. Zlate Moravce may be out of their depth.

ONE TO WATCH
Coming up to his 19th birthday, Mauro Gonzalez brings a rare touch of South American flair to the Slovak league as Slovan Bratislava have the Argentinian midfielder on a one-year loan deal from Boca Juniors.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Most of the close-season transfer activity surrounded loan and out-of-contract deals. Much travelled French-born Serb defender Stefan Milojevic played for Scottish side Morton before a surprise move to unsung Zlate Moravce.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Champions for the last five seasons running, who can stop Maribor? Domzale and Celje look the best of the rest, while promoted Krsko – who are nicknamed the "Nuclear Boys" after the local power plant – could prove a surprise package.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Of the bigger, traditional clubs, Koper and Gorica look to be struggling, while few expect Rudar to do anything but disappoint. Promoted in 2013, tiny Zavrc will hope to keep their place again.

ONE TO WATCH
Son of former national team captain Ales Ceh, and someone who never broke through as a teenager at Olimpija, 21-year-old midfielder Tim Ceh has the chance to come into his own at promoted Krsko.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Good things are expected of 20-year-old Croatian striker Antonio Mance, who joined Domzale from Istra 1961. He has been capped at under-21 level by his country.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
The New Saints are favourites to gain a fifth consecutive title. The main challengers will be last terms' runners-up Bala Town, Airbus UK Broughton and Aberystwyth Town, who have huge potential.

BASEMENT BATTLERS
Haverfordwest County and Llandudno may struggle, while three-times former champions Bangor City have apparently had another cut in their budget. Rhyl, who are under new management, may take time to get into their stride.

ONE TO WATCH

Capped more than 20 times by Wales at under-21 level, could this be the season striker **Marc Williams**' career takes off at Llandudno?

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Previously top scorer in the league for seven consecutive seasons, 35-year-old Rhys Griffiths has joined Aberystwyth Town, where he will link up with Chris Venables in a formidable looking strike-force.

World Soccer vintage 41 years ago

August 1974

Brian Glanville praises the rebirth of wingers at the World Cup

With the World Cup finals still fresh in the memory, the cover of *World Soccer*'s August 1974 edition featured Italy captain Giacinto Facchetti exchanging pennants with his counterpart from Haiti, Wilner Nazaire, prior to their group game in Munich.

Reflecting on the tournament, and under the headline of "Wingers still live!", Brian Glanville reported on the teams that flourished using wide men. "The importance of wingers was abundantly shown," he wrote. "There are certain things a natural winger can do which no other player can: go outside the man, reach the byline and pull the ball back.

"Poland have a wonderful pair of wingers; a pair who tore holes in the defences of the Argentinians, Haitians and Italians on their way to the final stage. Grzegorz Lato and Robert Gadocha are both superb, strong runners with excellent control and a willingness to go straight for goal."

He went on to comment: "Rene Houseman [of Argentina] was one of the most exciting wingers of the tournament. One sat there amazed to see [Italy's] Fabio Capello, essentially a creative inside-forward, given the task of marking little Houseman."

And Romeo Benetti "had an even worse time against Houseman than Capello", according to Glanville, who added: "Had they marked zonally, Capello would not have been obliged to follow Houseman around like Mary's little lamb; nor would Benetti have been assigned to a task not really grateful to him.

"To make him a virtual full-back was bound to be a dangerous experiment against that rare breed: a natural winger."

Meanwhile, the eventual runners-up also had Glanville purring: "Holland had [Rob] Rensenbrink, who can go to either wing with success but was somewhat overshadowed by [Johan] Cruyff, who plays on the left wing as well and as elusively as any left-winger has ever done."

Yet not every team used a winger – even those who had them in their squad, with Glanville pointing out that Scotland manager Willie Ormond consistently overlooked Jimmy Johnstone in his squad of 22.

"We all know Johnstone is a law unto himself," said Glanville. "But he is also a player of undeniable genius, a player always capable of doing the unexpected, who can suddenly get you a goal when you need it most.

"I also think Johnstone would have had a picnic against Zaire, perhaps helping Scotland to score the goals that they needed.

"Note that the Yugoslav goal [in their match against Scotland] was made by a superb natural winger, Dragan Dzajic, and that the Scottish goal was made in a still more classical winger's way when Tommy Hutchison brought the ball up to his man on the byline and splendidly beat him."

And what of the winners? Despite West Germany not employing out-and-out wingers in their triumph, they had, as Glanville acknowledged: "Two men quite capable of playing on the right wing.

"Jurgen Grabowski was an outside-right by vocation, meanwhile much of Uli Hoeness' best attacking work is done on the right wing, where he, too, began." WS

Issue...captains Facchetti (below left) with Nazaire, and our report on World Cup wingers (right)

EIGHTEEN — WORLD SOCCER, August, 1974

Brian Glanville says...

Wingers still live!

WINGERS live. This, surely, was one of the most salient lessons of the 1974 World Cup. I must confess to a certain feeling of pleasure when I heard that Hennes Weisweiler, the manager of Borussia Munchengladbach, had criticised West Germany's Helmut Schoen because he hadn't used them. Not altogether fairly, I felt, having been present at the surprising match in Hamburg where the East Germans, with Sparwasser's breakaway goal, beat the West.

After all, there were in that team no fewer than two men quite capable of playing on the right wing, and an overlapping full-back, in Paul Breitner, well able to function on the left; the purveyor of some extremely dangerous balls to Gerd Muller. Moreover, even if it is true that Jurgen Grabowski plays for his club in midfield, and had a poor game against the DDR, it is equally true that he was an outside-right by vocation.

Who can easily forget the way he turned poor, exhausted Terry Cooper inside out in that World Cup quarter final in Leon, four years ago, to tip the match towards West Germany? Meanwhile, much of Uli Hoeness' best attacking work is done on the right wing, where he, too, began.

But the importance of wingers was abundantly shown, and it seems more ludicrous than ever that England should have elected virtually to play without them since 1966, when Sir Alf's Wingless Wonders won the World Cup. Slavishly and unimaginatively, club managers followed suit, natural wingers were discouraged, and the consequence is that we now have pathetically few of them.

Breach

Yet as we know, there are certain things a natural winger can do which no other player can; go outside the man, reach the by line, and pull the ball back. Not that one has always to be a winger to do it. Mike Channon said to me on the successful England summer tour that he knew he was capable of "hitting the line". Hitting it, moreover, on either flank. Unless you can do this, it is still terribly difficult to breach a packed defence; as England found against the Poles, at Wembley.

Poland themselves, as we know, have a wonderful pair of wingers; a pair who tore holes in the defences of the Argentinians, Haitians and Italians, on their way to the final stages. Lato and Gadocha are both superb, strong runners with excellent control, and a willingness to go straight for goal. Indeed, I honestly think that the loss of the great Lubanski was in some respect a blessing in disguise for the Poles.

When you have a player of such stature and accomplishment in your team, the natural tendency is to play to him. When Lubanski dropped out, Poland did not weaken. Indeed, it seems to me that two positive things happened. In the first place, the Poles were able to bring in Lato, which balanced the attack beautifully, giving it thrust down both flanks; not forgetting the fact that Lato, as he showed Hunter at Wembley, can flourish down the left, as well. Secondly, it allowed Deyna to blossom in midfield.

Karlsson and goalkeeper Hellstroem of Sweden cannot prevent Lato of Poland from scoring in their second round match. Poland won 1-0.

> **"We all know [Jimmy] Johnstone is a law unto himself, but he is also a player of undeniable genius"**
>
> Brian Glanville

WORLD SOCCER, August, 1974 NINETEEN

The brilliant Johan Cruyff scores for Holland against Brazil.

Rene Houseman was one of the most exciting wingers of the tournament. I am still marvelling at the ingeniousness of Ferruccio Valcareggi, the Italian team manager, when the sides met in Stuttgart. O se sat there amazed to see Favio Capello, essentially a creative inside-forward, given the task of marking little Houseman.

This meant that the Italians lost on two distinct counts. They lost, that is to say, a fine inside-forward, and gained, if that is the word, an extremely indifferent full-back. And it took Valcareggi twenty-five minutes, a goal by Houseman, and a near miss by Babington when Zoff saved, to rectify his mistake.

Not that he truly rectified it, for if anything the rugged, ruthless Benetti had an even worse time against Houseman than Capello. Man to man marking is the Italian obsession. Had they marked zonally, Capello would not have been obliged to follow Houseman around like Mary's little lamb; nor would Benetti have been assigned to a task not really grateful to him. For Benetti is essentially an inside-forward who has been pressed into service as a half-back. To make him a virtual full-back was bound to be a dangerous experiment against that rare breed, a natural winger.

Assaults

Houseman, with courage, swerve, speed, footwork and initiative, turned Benetti over time and again, scoring the cruel assaults on his ankles. Moral: a natural winger needs to have a natural full-back against him. The bewildering thing is that Valcareggi afterwards said that he had not only had Houseman watched but had watched him, himself. In that case how on earth could he ever have mistaken him for a midfield player? He might almost as well have taken him for a centre-half.

Then there is, or was, the case of Jimmy Johnstone. Here, I believe that Scotland's excessive caution may have cost them their qualification. We all know that Johnstone is a law unto himself, undisciplined, if you please, on the field and sometimes off it. But he is also a player of undeniable genius, a player always capable of doing the unexpected, who can suddenly get you a goal when you need it most.

Even as hard shooting a forward as Peter Lorimer couldn't manage it against the Brazilians and the Yugoslavs. I also think Johnstone would have had a picnic against Zaire, perhaps helping Scotland to score the goals they needed, rather than go out in such a sad, unfair and anti-climatic way.

Note that the Yugoslav goal was made by a superb natural winger, Dragan Dzajic, and that the Scottish goal was made in a still more classical winger's way when Tommy Hutchinson brought the ball up to his man on the by-line, and splendidly beat him.

Talents

Brazil, alas for them, found that they were caught between two fires with Jairzinho. Play him on the right wing and there was no decent centre-forward. Play him in the middle and he simply didn't get adequate room to express his enormous talents; his pace, power and swerve.

Curiously, the East Germans dropped both their wingers, Lowe and Vogel, from the match against West Germany, and were none the worse for it. I shall not claim them to be the exception that proves the rule, but I think it legitimate to say that the West German defence, in its opening games, was incredibly open through the middle. Getting round the back of a more heavily manned and better organised defence might well have been another story.

It must also be admitted that the surprising Swedes owed little to orthodox wing play. Grahn, it is true, was once an excellent right winger, while Benno Magnusson played on the wing for Kaiserslautern, but the attack turned essentially on the excellence of Edstroem and Sandberg, those old "partners in crime" from Swedish club football. There was no Kurre Hamrin, no Nacka Skoglund, as in the famous Swedish World Cup team of 1958.

Holland had Rensenbrink, who can go to either wing with success, but was somewhat overshadowed by Cruyff; who plays on the left wing as well and as elusively as any left winger has ever done. But then Cruyff is surely a law to his remarkable self.

● Continued from page 17

Overall Barry Davies emerged as the best of the commentators. Mind you, he must have wished the ground would open up during his first match of the tournament when he said of the West Germans: "They're playing into Chilean hands." Alas for Barry a split second later Paul Breitner slammed in Germany's first goal.

Barry recovered well and more than atoned when during the Holland v. Argentina match he said: "You have the feeling the Dutch could score when they want to like now." Johnny Rep had obliged at exactly the right moment.

When it came to on-the-spot informed opinion BBC also came out tops with Celtic's Jock Stein being an outstanding contributor. His pre-match analysis of the final was spot on.

Sir Alf Ramsey gave us an insight into his knowledge of overseas players which more than compensated for all those 'most certainly' and 'all credit' lines that punctuated his comments. And it must have been unsettling for Sir Alf, never at his best when facing the camera, to be interviewed by Gary Newbon, who didn't seem nearly strong enough on football to be given such an important job.

When it comes to presentation however, the West German Television service has much to learn from their British counterparts. The smart direction of BBC's Alec Weeks and John McConagle or ITV's Bob Gardam was something that was definitely missed.

Also in this issue...

p36 Don Revie had been appointed England manager after leading Leeds United through the most successful period of their history. Eric Thornton, who had known Revie for years, wrote: "Now 47, and abdicating as king of England's champion club, he moves into Lancaster Gate because of topping 249 other applicants for the England job, and takes with him a 10-year managerial reference of almost unbroken triumph." Elsewhere, it is reported how Brian Clough had been appointed Revie's successor at Leeds – a position that would last just 44 days.

p15 In the aftermath of the World Cup finals, Sweden's goalkeeper was praised by Keir Radnedge as the best in the tournament. He wrote: "Of all their players, the one who had the biggest personal success was not Ralf Edstrom or Roland Sandberg but goalkeeper Ronnie Hellstrom. Against Uruguay, in the last match of the first round, he was superb, flinging himself in all directions to keep out some fine efforts."

p39 The former right-half of the legendary "Mighty Magyars", Jozsef Bozsik was appointed Hungary coach, prompting Leslie Vernon to comment: "I applaud the appointment of 'Cucu'. He is immensely respected by the players, has been a perfect sportsman, and will be a good ambassador for Hungarian football."

p34-35 Dynamo Kiev were featured in a Club Focus and Jack Rollin claimed they were the USSR's best hope of winning European honours, after Dynamo Moscow had reached the Final of the Cup-winners Cup in 1972 and lost to Rangers. Rollin believed that "their colleagues from Kiev have every hope of going one better during the present season".

10 years ago

Panama reached the Final of the CONCACAF Gold Cup for the first time in their history and gallantly held the hosts, USA, to a goalless draw after extra-time in New Jersey before losing 3-1 in a penalty shoot-out. Luis Tejada (below) missed his spot-kick for Panama.

20 years ago

The Premier League welcomed a host of European stars at the start of the new season. Arsenal signed Dennis Bergkamp from Internazionale (below, left), Ruud Gullit (right) joined Chelsea from Sampdoria and Newcastle United bought David Ginola from PSG.

30 years ago

Brazil – with the likes of Socrates, Zico and Junior still around from their 1982 team – and Argentina, inspired by Diego Maradona and under the leadership of Carlos Bilardo, both secured their passage to the World Cup finals to be played in Mexico the following summer.

40 years ago

Pele had recently joined New York Cosmos and was taking the NASL by storm. *World Soccer*'s Paul Radford asked whether the Brazilian, who retired from international football after the 1970 World Cup, might consider making a comeback for the 1978 tournament.

50 years ago

With just under a year to go to the World Cup finals in England, rank outsiders Norway caused a major shock by topping their qualifying group. They finished ahead of European powers France and Yugoslavia, after beating the Yugoslavs 3-0 on a bumpy pitch in Oslo.

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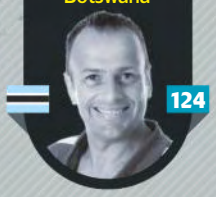

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Champions...River Plate win the Libertadores Cup

JULY 6-AUGUST 5, 2015

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Monday July 6

YEMEN: FIFA rule that Yemen's 1-0 home defeat to North Korea in June is to be forfeited and awarded as a 3-0 victory to the visitors as the hosts' Mudir Al Radaei had failed to serve a automatic one-match ban.

Tuesday July 7

GIBRALTAR: Lincoln Red Imps win 2-1 at Santa Coloma in Andorra to become the first side from Gibraltar to win a Champions League tie, having drawn their home game 0-0.
GOLD CUP: Michael Bradley wins his 100th cap and Clint Dempsey scores twice as the USA begin their CONCACAF Gold Cup title defence by beating Honduras 2-1. Haiti and Panama draw 1-1 in the other game in the opening day's double-header.
ITALY: Massimiliano Allegri, who won the double and led Juventus to the Champions League Final in his first season as coach, signs a one-year contract extension, tieing him to the club until June 2017.

Wednesday July 8

ROMANIA: Last season's league runners-up Targu Mures pick up their first-ever silverware, beating double winners Steaua Bucharest 1-0 in the Romanian Super Cup. The winners' coach, Dan Petrescu, who was taking charge of his first game, quit after the match and joined Chinese side Jiangsu Sainty.

Thursday July 9

FRANCE: Starting from the 2016-17 season, only two teams will be relegated from Ligue 1, instead of the usual three, with only two clubs coming up from Ligue 2.
GOLD CUP: Visa problems mean Cuba have just 16 players to chose from as they lose 6-0 to Mexico, with Oribe Peralta scoring a hat-trick.

Friday July 10

ALBANIA: The Court of Arbitration for Sport upholds an appeal and awards Albania a 3-0 win over Serbia after their Euro 2016 qualifier in Belgrade. UEFA initially awarded Serbia a 3-0 win, but also docked the hosts three points. The game in October was abandoned when fans invaded the pitch and attacked visiting players after a pro-Albanian flag was flown over the stadium. Serbia's points deduction still stands.
SINGAPORE: Albirex Niigata beat Balestier Khalsa 2-1 with a last-minute goal from Kento Nagasaki in the Singapore League Cup Final.

Saturday July 11

ALGERIA: An own goal by MC Eulma goalkeeper Tarek Mahsas gives CAF Champions League holders ES Setif a 1-0 win in their all-Algerian group game.
CAMBODIA: Chan Vathanaka scores eight times as Boeung Ket Angkor win 12-2 away to Kirivong Sok Sen Chey in the Cambodian League.

Reward...Massimo Allegri will stay with Juve until 2017

EGYPT: El Gouna lose 2-1 to Wadi Degla and are relegated – along with El Raja, Al Nasr, Al Assiouty Sport and Ala'ab Damanhour – as the Egyptian Premier League is reduced to 18 teams for next season.
IRAQ: Naft Al Wasat become only the second club to win the Iraqi Premier League title in their debut season, beating Quwa Al Jawiya on penalties after a goalless draw in the play-off Final.

Sunday July 12

BULGARIA: Two Lokomotiv Gorna Oryahovitsa players – including Anthony Balakov, who is the nephew of Krassimir Balakov – are hospitalised after being attacked by Cherno supporters during the first half of a pre-season friendly. The fans responded to a gesture from a Lokomotiv player who was sent off.

Action..Albania are awarded a 3-0 win

CROATIA: Defending champions Dinamo Zageb are held 1-1 at home by Hajduk Split on the opening weekend of the new league season.
ECUADOR: Libertadores Cup winners in 2008, LDU Quito book their place in the group stage of next year's competition by winning the first phase of their domestic league. They beat city rivals El Nacional 1-0 to finish two points ahead of Emelec.
FIJI: A first-ever Olympic Games appearance is sealed for Fiji with a penalty shoot-out victory against Vanuatu, who replaced New Zealand in the play-off Final after they fielded an ineligible player.
GEORGIA: Three people are hospitalised, and dozens need medical treatment, as fans descended on kiosks in Tbilisi to buy tickets for the Super Cup game between Barcelona and Sevilla at the city's Boris Paichadze Dinamo Arena on August 11.
GOLD CUP: Mexico fail to score for the first time in 32 Gold Cup games as they are held to a goalless draw ➤

CONCACAF Gold Cup

BRYAN KAY

Hot shot...Guardado is congratulated by team-mates after scoring for Mexico in the Final

Caribbean islands are on the rise

Gold for Mexico, but plaudits go elsewhere

While Mexico may have won their seventh CONCACAF Gold Cup, the highlights from the latest edition of the North and Central American tournament came courtesy of three Caribbean islands.

In a group with Costa Rica, who were the region's highest-ranked side prior to the competition in the USA and Canada, Jamaica opened their campaign with a 2-2 draw against "*Los Ticos*", before going on to beat Canada and El Salvador to take top spot.

After a 1-0 win against Haiti, Winfried Schafer's side then met the USA in the semi-finals in a game that the Reggae Boyz coach said "feels like David against Goliath". But goals from Darren Mattocks and Giles Barnes gave his side a shock 2-1 and denied the US a place in the Gold Cup Final for the first time in 12 years.

Jamaica therefore became the first-ever Caribbean side to contest the Final – and even a 3-1 loss to Mexico could not dampen Schafer spirits.

"For me, this is not silver, this is gold," said the 65-year-old German. "Nobody gave us a chance. I am very proud to be the coach of this team."

He added: "I have never seen this spirit in a team. These players gave their hearts for this country, for this island. Nobody understands what the players are doing for this country."

If anything, fellow islanders Trinidad & Tobago were even more convincing than Jamaica in the early stage of the competition, even managing to finish above Mexico in their group.

Led by striker Kenwyne Jones, T&T eased past Guatemala and Cuba, before matching "*El Tri*" punch for punch in a 4-4 thriller in which they went 4-3 down in the last minute, only to equalize four minutes into stoppage time.

It took penalty kicks for Panama to eliminate the "Soca Warriors" in the quarter-finals.

Haiti, meanwhile, finished above Panama in their group and only lost narrowly to the USA before falling to Jamaica in the last eight.

As for the eventual champions, Mexico were largely disappointing and needed some dismal refereeing decisions to help them on their way, although they were thoroughly deserved winners in the Final.

They needed a controversial penalty – awarded for a seemingly phantom foul on Oribe Peralta – in the fourth minute of extra-time to get past Costa Rica in the quarter-finals. And in the semi-final against Panama things got even worse.

Trailing 2-1 and heading into injury time, Mexico were yet again awarded a spot-kick, which after lengthy protests from Panama, Andres Guardado dispatched to take the game into extra-time. Down to 10 men, the incensed Panamanians could not believe what they were witnessing as US referee Mark Geiger awarded Mexico another spot-kick midway through extra-time, which allowed Guardado to score the winner.

Given the ubiquity of disquiet over Mexico's passage to the Final, there was further insult away from the pitch after their triumph when coach Miguel Herrera inexplicably got involved in a violent confrontation with a Mexican journalist – and was sacked after punching the reporter. WS

➤ by Guatemala. Trinidad & Tobago qualify for the knockout stage by beating Cuba 2-0. Midfielder Arael Arguellez becomes the second Cuban to defect during the tournament, following in the footsteps of Kailen Garcia, leaving the squad down to 15 players.

PAN AMERICAN GAMES: Panama beat Peru 2-1 in the opening game of the men's football tournament at Hamilton in Ontario, Canada.

ROMANIA: All six games on the opening weekend of the league campaign end in a draw.

RUSSIA: League champions Zenit beat cup holders Lokomotiv Moscow on penalties, after drawing 1-1 after extra time, in the Russian Super Cup.

USA: Sebastian Giovinco scores a nine-minute hat-trick in Toronto's 4-4 draw with New York City – the third-fastest treble in MLS history.

Monday July 13

COLOMBIA: Apertura winners Deportivo Cali lose 1-0 at home to Jaguares in their opening game of the clausura campaign.

Tuesday July 14

ARGENTINA: Second-half goals from Gabriel Mercado and Rodrigo Mora give River Plate a 2-0 advantage over Guarani of Paraguay after the home leg of their Libertadores Cup semi-final.

BRAZIL: Former international star Rivaldo, who is now 43, and his 20-year-old son, Rivaldinho, both get on the scoresheet as Mogi Mirim beat Macae 3-1 in the Brazilian second tier.

BULGARIA: Ludogorets, who played Liverpool and Real Madrid in last season's Champions League group stage, lose 1-0 at home to Milsami Orhei of Macedonia in the first leg of the second qualifying round of this season's competition.

ENGLAND: Twenty-year-old Raheem Sterling becomes the most expensive English player of all time as he joins Manchester City from Liverpool for £49million.

UKRAINE: Shakhtar Donetsk score twice in the last minute to win 2-0 in the Ukrainian Super Cup against Dynamo Kiev, who have goalkeeper Olexandr Shovkovskyi and midfielder Serhiy Rybalka sent off.

Wednesday July 15

GOLD CUP: After conceding eight goals in their first two games, and seeing two players defect while in the US, Cuba book a place in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 win over Guatemala in their last group game.

LUXEMBOURG: Beaten 6-0 on ➤

UEFA Champions League

GAVIN HAMILTON

Early shocks in qualifiers

Ajax and Fenerbahce fall at first hurdle

Ajax and Fenerbahce were two of the big names that crashed out of the Champions League at the first hurdle, losing to Rapid Vienna and Shakhtar Donetsk respectively in the third qualifying round.

Ajax lost 3-2 at home to Rapid Vienna in the second leg of their tie to go out 5-4 on aggregate. In the opening leg – at the Vienna stadium where they won the European Cup 20 years ago – they had thrown away a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with 10-man Rapid.

In the return leg, the Dutch side went 2-0 down in the first half at the Amsterdam Arena before levelling the tie at 4-4 on aggregate, only for Louis Schaub to score a late winner for Rapid.

"This is so sad, for us and Dutch football," said Ajax coach Frank De Boer, who was criticised for his decision to leave the likes of Nemanja Gudelj, Lasse Schone, Ricardo Van Rhijn and Johnny Heitinga on the bench. "I felt that this young team could make the difference. Unfortunately this was not the case.

"We will continue. The Europa League is very important because it is crucial to play in Europe."

The defeat left Ajax in the play-off round of the continent's junior tournament, along with Turkey's Fenerbahce, who spent heavily this summer, recruiting star names from Manchester United in Robin Van Persie and Nani, as well as Danish defender Simon Kjaer and Portuguese coach Vitor Pereira.

Beaten...another setback for Fenerbahce's Moussa Sow

Out...Ajax went out in the stadium where they won the European Cup 20 years ago

Fener's two games against Shakhtar were their first in European competition since the end of a two-year ban for match-fixing, and despite a goalless first leg in Istanbul, they travelled to Lviv, Shakhtar's temporary home, in confident mood

However, without the injured Van Persie, the visitors struggled against a resurgent Shakhtar, who showed few signs of being weakened by the summer departures of Douglas Costa and Luiz Adriano, to Bayern Munich and Milan respectively.

Oleksandr Hladkyy gave the hosts the lead in the first half when he turned in Darijo Srna's near-post cross. Srna then doubled their advantage from the penalty spot after Volkan Demirel had brought down Marlos. Alex Teixeira wrapped things up three minutes later with a goal on the break, while Kjaer was sent off in stoppage time.

Steaua Bucharest, European champions in 1986,

also missed out on the chance to progress to the group stage as they were beaten by Partizan Belgrade.

After a 1-1 draw in the first leg, Steaua looked on course to progress when Algerian winger Jugurtha Hamroun gave them a first-half lead. But the game turned on the 47th-minute sending-off of their captain Fernando Varela and Partizan scored three times in the second period to turn the tie around.

> "I felt that this young team could make the difference. Unfortunately this was not the case" Ajax coach Frank De Boer

While Rapid Vienna were surprise victors over Ajax, their Austrian counterparts Red Bull Salzburg one again came up short, beaten by Sweden's Malmo.

However, there was disappointment elsewhere in Scandinavia as Norwegian champions Molde lost on away goals to Dinamo Zagreb, while Midtjylland of Denmark provided Cypriot champions APOEL, who competed in last year's group stage, with another scalp.

It was a disappointing round for both teams from Czech Republic as Sparta Prague lost to CSKA Moscow and champions Viktoria Plzen were surpassingly beaten by Maccabi Tel Aviv, going down 2-0 at home in the second leg.

There were easy wins for Monaco, 7-1 on aggregate over Young Boys, while Swiss champions Basle were 4-1 aggregate winners over Poland's Lech Poznan. Celtic survived a long trip to Azerbaijan, drawing the second leg 0-0 away to Qarabag after a 1-0 win in Glasgow.

And two lesser teams made unexpected progress. Albanian champions Skenderbeu reached the play-offs after a win over Moldova's Milsami, while Astana of Kazakhstan beat Finland's HJK Helsinki. WS

➤ aggregate by Dinamo Zagreb at this stage of the competition two years ago, Fola Esch take a step towards the third qualifying round of the Champions League with a 1-1 first-leg draw in Croatia against the same opponents, despite playing the last 26 minutes with 10 men after captain Ronny Souto is sent off.

MEXICO: Hugo Ayala keeps alive Tigres' dream of becoming the first Mexican side to win the Libertadores Cup with a crucial away goal in their 2-1 semi-final loss to Internacional. However, Ayala will miss the return leg after being sent off in Brazil.

Thursday July 16

ARMENIA: Shirak see red three times as Arman Hovhannisyan, Gor Malakyan and sub Andranik Barikyan are sent off in the 2-0 Europa League loss to AIK in Sweden.

BELGIUM: A Laurent Depoitre goal three minutes from time gives Gent a 1-0 victory over Club Brugge in the Belgian Super Cup.

ISRAEL: Eli Tabib, the owner of Beitar Jerusalem, says he will put the Israeli Premier League side up for sale because he felt ashamed of supporters who threw smoke bombs, flares and firecrackers as the team lost 5-1 at Charleroi of Belgium in the Europa League. "I have decided to end my involvement with Israeli soccer and am returning to the United States," says Tabib.

Friday July 17

FRANCE: Last season's Ligue 2 champions Troyes finally have their promotion ratified upon appeal after French football's financial arbitrator blocked their ascent due to a lack of assurances over funding.

Saturday July 18

ARGENTINA: Fernando Cavenaghi scores four goals as River Plate win 5-1 away to Atletico Rafaela. However, arch-rivals Boca Juniors maintain top spot with a 2-1 home win against Quilmes.

BRAZIL: Pele is readmitted to hospital for the third time in a year, to undergo back surgery. He had previously been in for a urinary infection and prostate surgery.

GOLD CUP: A Clint Dempsey hat-trick helps USA to a 6-0 win over Cuba in the Gold Cup quarter-finals. Gyasi Zardes, Aron Johansson and Omar Gonzalez scored the other goals. They will now meet Jamaica, who are through to the semi-finals with a 1-0 victory over Haiti, thanks to Giles Barnes goal.

SINGAPORE: Arsenal beat Everton 3-1 in the Final of the pre-season ➤

➤ Barclays Premier Trophy in front of a crowd of 52,000 at Singapore's National Stadium, with goals from Theo Walcott, Santi Cazorla and Mesut Ozil.
SPAIN: Josep Maria Bartomeu is re-elected as president of Barcelona with 54 per cent of the vote. His nearest challenger, former president Joan Laporta, polls 33 per cent.
USA: Steven Gerrard scores on his MLS debut as Los Angeles Galaxy beat San Jose Earthquakes 5-2 to win the "California Clasico". Former Liverpool team-mate Robbie Keane scores a hat-trick in the game.

Sunday July 19

GOLD CUP: An Andres Guardado penalty in extra-time secures Mexico's place in the semi-finals as they defeat Costa Rica 1-0. They will now face Panama, who beat Trinidad & Tobago 6-5 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in their quarter-final.
PORTUGAL: The hosts Portugal beat Tahiti 5-3 in the Final to win the Beach Soccer World Cup.
RUSSIA: Champions Zenit begin the defence of their title with a 2-1 win at home to Dynamo Moscow. Newly promoted Anzhi lose 1-0 at home to Krylya Sovetov on their return.
SPAIN: Goals from Borja Mayoral and substitute Matias Nahuel secure Spain's seventh European Under-19 title in 14 years with a 2-0 victory over Russia in the Final.
SWITZERLAND: There are opening day wins for champions Basle and Grasshoppers as the Swiss league campaign kicked off. Basle beat Vaduz 2-0 while Grasshoppers win 5-3 away to Thun.

Monday July 20

AUSTRALIA: Manchester City's new signing Raheem Sterling scores in a 2-2 draw with Roma in the International Champions Cup friendly in Melbourne. City win the penalty shoot-out 5-4.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA announce the presidential election, to succeed Sepp Blatter, will be held on February 26.

Tuesday July 21

ARGENTINA: River Plate go through to the Libertadores Cup Final with a 1-1 draw against Guarani in Paraguay to win 3-1 on aggregate.
EGYPT: Eight people are arrested after Zamalek lose 2-0 to arch-rivals Al Ahly, in a match played behind closed doors in Alexandria, following clashes between fans in Cairo.

Wednesday July 22

BELGIUM: Christian Benteke becomes the most expensive Belgian player of all time as he joins Liverpool from fellow Premier League side Aston Villa for a fee of £32.5m.
GOLD CUP: Jamaica reach the Final for the first time after beating defending champions USA 2-1. They will now meet Mexico, who beat 10-man Panama 2-1.
MEXICO: Tigres overturn a first-leg deficit to win 3-1 against Brazil's Internacional and go through to the Final of the Libertadores Cup, triumphing 4-3 on aggregate.
USA: Barcelona beat Los Angeles Galaxy 2-1 in a friendly in front of a crowd of 93,226 at the Pasadena Rose Bowl in California – which is a record attendance for a club game involving a side from MLS.

Thursday July 23

CROATIA: UEFA deduct one point from Croatia in their Euro qualifying group after a swastika was painted on the pitch before the game against Italy in June.
HUNGARY: Seven different players score as Debrecen beat Latvia's ➤

Libertadores...Guarani's Gabriel Mercado evades Federico Santander of River Plate

China

JOHN DUERDEN

New boy...Paulinho

Big names boost Super League

Overseas stars contribute to an exciting finale

The current Chinese Super League (CSL) season is the most exciting for years. Off the pitch, clubs have ramped up the spending in a way not seen in East Asia since the start of the J-League. And on it, four teams – full of stars, ambition and goals – are competing for the title.

Guangzhou Evergrande were the first side to spend big to bring in European, South American and local talent and they have been the most successful, winning every title since 2011. Coached by Luiz Felipe Scolari, who arrived in June, there is a strong Brazilian streak running through the club on the Pearl River Delta, with Paulinho and Robinho recently adding to the existing South American contingent of Ricardo Goulart and Elkeson.

The 2002 World Cup-winning Scolari replaced Fabio Cannavaro, the Italian who lasted little more than six months in his first coaching role after succeeding countryman Marcello Lippi. Cannavaro did well despite numerous injury problems, but his team always looked better going forward than they were at the back. However, his biggest problem was that he was not a Brazilian at a time when the owners were deciding to head in a South American direction.

SIPG's game against Guangzhou could be decisive – and a chance for Eriksson to gain a modicum of revenge against Scolari

If "Big Phil" delivers their fifth title, and a second Asian Champions League crown in three years, he should at least call the Italian to say "thank you" for leaving a team in the thick of the title race and in the last eight of Asia's biggest club competition.

The chase for the continental crown could make all the difference to Guangzhou Evergrande's CSL title hopes. Such was their domestic dominance in 2013 that Lippi could focus solely on Asia in the latter stages. But that will not be the case this time.

This season there is plenty of competition, not least from Shanghai SIPG. Fifth last term, they reacted by bringing in Sven Goran Eriksson, and the Swede has been allowed to invest in South American stars with proven records in China, such as Dario Conca and Davi. Then, in July, he smashed the Asian transfer record and paid over $20million to sign Asamoah Gyan from Al Ain of UAE. SIPG were already finding the net pretty easily even before the arrival of the Ghanian striker, who averaged over a goal a game in the Emirates.

SIPG's home game against Guangzhou Evergrande on September 12 could be decisive – and a chance for Eriksson to gain a modicum of revenge against Scolari, who ended England's World Cup campaign in 2002 with Brazil and their Euro 2004 hopes with Portugal.

Shandong Luneng have been quietly keeping pace with the top two and the east-coast club has more cause than most to regret the new wave of spending that took off around 2010. That was the year Shandong won the league title for the third time in five years – the last team to do so before Guangzhou Evergrande's period of dominance.

While coach Cuca was a little lucky to survive last season, he brought in fellow Brazilian Diego Tardelli in January and, after a slow start, the 30-year-old has started to deliver. If he continues to do so, Shandong remain an outside shout for the title.

As do Beijing Guoan, who as a club were initially a little sniffy about the new money flowing into the domestic game and have taken a more low-key approach under Spanish boss Gregorio Manzano. In 2014, they pushed Guangzhou Evergrande to the final game of the season and, despite a hiccup in July, are still in this term's race.

Nobody else is going to make the top four, but Shanghai Shenhua will want to finish as high as possible. Desperate for a return to former glories after years of mid-table mediocrity, Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka arrived in 2012 but made little impact in their short stay. Tim Cahill was signed in February this year and, in July, around $16m was enough to secure the services of Demba Ba, who was joined by former Liverpool and Juventus star Mohamed Sissoko.

Such stars and excitement mean more fans, and average attendances this season are touching 23,000 – the best in Asia, given that it's hard to include the Indian Super League as it has just eight teams, lasts only 10 weeks and has been around for just a year.

With a sense that there is still more to come, for now Chinese fans are just enjoying the big names, the big games and a title race that is set to go to the wire. WS

In charge...Luiz Felipe Scolari

➤ Skonto 9-2 in the Europa League to record their biggest-ever victory in continental competition.

Friday July 24

AUSTRALIA: A crowd of 99,382 – which is a record for a football-only event at Melbourne Cricket Ground – witness Real Madrid beating Manchester City 4-1 in the International Champions Cup.
BELGIUM: Last season's second-tier champions Sint-Truiden start the new top-flight campaign with a 2-1 victory over Club Brugge.
RUSSIA: FIFA announces that the 2017 Confederations Cup in Russia will be staged from June 17 to July 2, with the following year's World Cup running from June 14 to July 15.

Saturday July 25

AUSTRIA: Promoted Mattersburg beat reigning champions Salzburg 2-1 in their opening game of the new season.
PHILIPPINES: Promoted from the second tier last term, Ceres wrap up their first-ever United Football League title with two games to spare, by thrashing Team Socceroo 6-0.
SWITZERLAND: Michael Lang scores the winner against the club he left last month as reigning champions Basle come from behind to beat Grasshoppers 3-2.

Sunday July 26

GOLD CUP: Mexico beat Jamaica 3-1 – with goals from Andres Guardado, Jesus Corona and Oribe Peralta – to win the CONCACAF Gold Cup for a record-extending seventh time. They will now face the USA in Pasadena, California, on 9 October for a place in the Confederations Cup in Russia.
MEXICO: Defending champions Santos Laguna have three players sent off – Agustin Marchesin, Djaniny Tavares and Cesar Ibanez – as they open their apertura campaign with a 3-1 home defeat by Leon.
SENEGAL: Niarry Tally's 0-0 draw at relegation-bound Port de Dakar lets in Douanes, who beat La Linguere 2-1, to claim the league title thanks to a better head-to-head record. Deposed champions Pikine are also relegated.
URUGUAY: Brian Lozano's goal gives Uruguay a 1-0 victory over Mexico in the Pan American Games Final in Hamilton, Canada. Brazil beat

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Tunisia go for Kasperczak again

Polish coach is back in charge of the national team

The French coach Claude Le Roy may be the godfather of national team bosses on the African continent, but Henryk Kasperczak is making his own bid at immortality. At the age of 69, the former Poland World Cup star has returned to take charge of Tunisia for what will be his seventh post in African football – all of them at international level.

The connection is through France, where Kasperczak played at the end of his successful career and where he has lived ever since, becoming a citizen and something of an Afrophile.

Tunisia, in particular, have fond memories of the ex-midfielder from Zabrze and had no hesitation in re-appointing him after the sudden resignation of George Leekens.

Kasperczak took Tunisia to the 1996 African Nations Cup Final, where they lost 2-0 to hosts South Africa, playing with an under-23 side that were using the tournament as a warm-up for the Olympic Games in Atlanta later that year.

Using the bulk of that squad, Tunisia were at the World Cup in France two years later – although after losing to England and Colombia, Kasperczak was sacked before their third game of the 1998 finals, a 1-1 draw with Romania.

He returns on a two-year deal that takes in the next Nations Cup, in Gabon, plus the World Cup qualifiers, and he will take charge once again in September, when Tunisia play Liberia in the second game of their group qualifiers for the Nations Cup.

Then, in November, they will meet either South Sudan or Mauritania over two legs as they begin their bid to qualify for the World Cup in Russia 2018.

"To lead the team to the World Cup in Russia is a priority," said Kasperczak on his appointment. "There are quality players in Tunisia. This is an advantage and an important base.

"Similarly, there are important players based with European clubs. It will be key to make the best choice."

Kasperczak has coached at six previous Nations Cup, just two shy of Le Roy's record.

He took Ivory Coast to third in 1994, Mali to fourth in 2002 and was fired midway through Senegal's tournament in 2008. He was in charge of Mali again earlier this year at the tournament in Equatorial Guinea, but he did not have his contract renewed after his side bizarrely went out in the first round after losing a rare drawing of lots to Guinea after both

Second spell...Kasperczak was previously coach of Tunisia from 1994 to 1998

NIGERIA AND IVORY COAST ALSO NAME NEW BOSSES

Tunisia were not the only country to change their coach before the second round of games in the 2017 African Nations Cup qualifiers.

Former Nigeria captain Sunday Oliseh, who played in the 1994 triumph, replaced Stephen Keshi as boss of the "Super Eagles". He has signed a three-year contract but says: "We are practically starting from scratch so people should not expect miracles from us."

And current continental champions Ivory Coast have appointed Michel Dussuyer to replace Herve Renard, who left to take charge of Lille after leading the country to success in Equatorial Guinea in February.

Dussuyer previously had three stints as coach of Guinea – most recently taking them to the quarter-finals of this year's tournament – and was in charge of Benin between 2008 and 2010. Prior to that he worked as an assistant to Henri Michel with Ivory Coast.

Holders...Dussuyer joins Ivory Coast

Panama 3-1 after extra time to take the bronze medal.
USA: Andrea Pirlo makes his MLS debut, coming on as a 57th-minute substitute as New York City beat Orlando City 5-3.

Monday July 27

ALGERIA: The Algerian Football Federation imposes an immediate ban on clubs signing foreign players due to a severe financial crisis caused by a plunge in oil revenues.
ENGLAND: Manchester United manager Louis Van Gaal says he will retire in 2017. The 63-year-old has promised his wife, Truus, his current job will be his last in the game.

Tuesday July 28

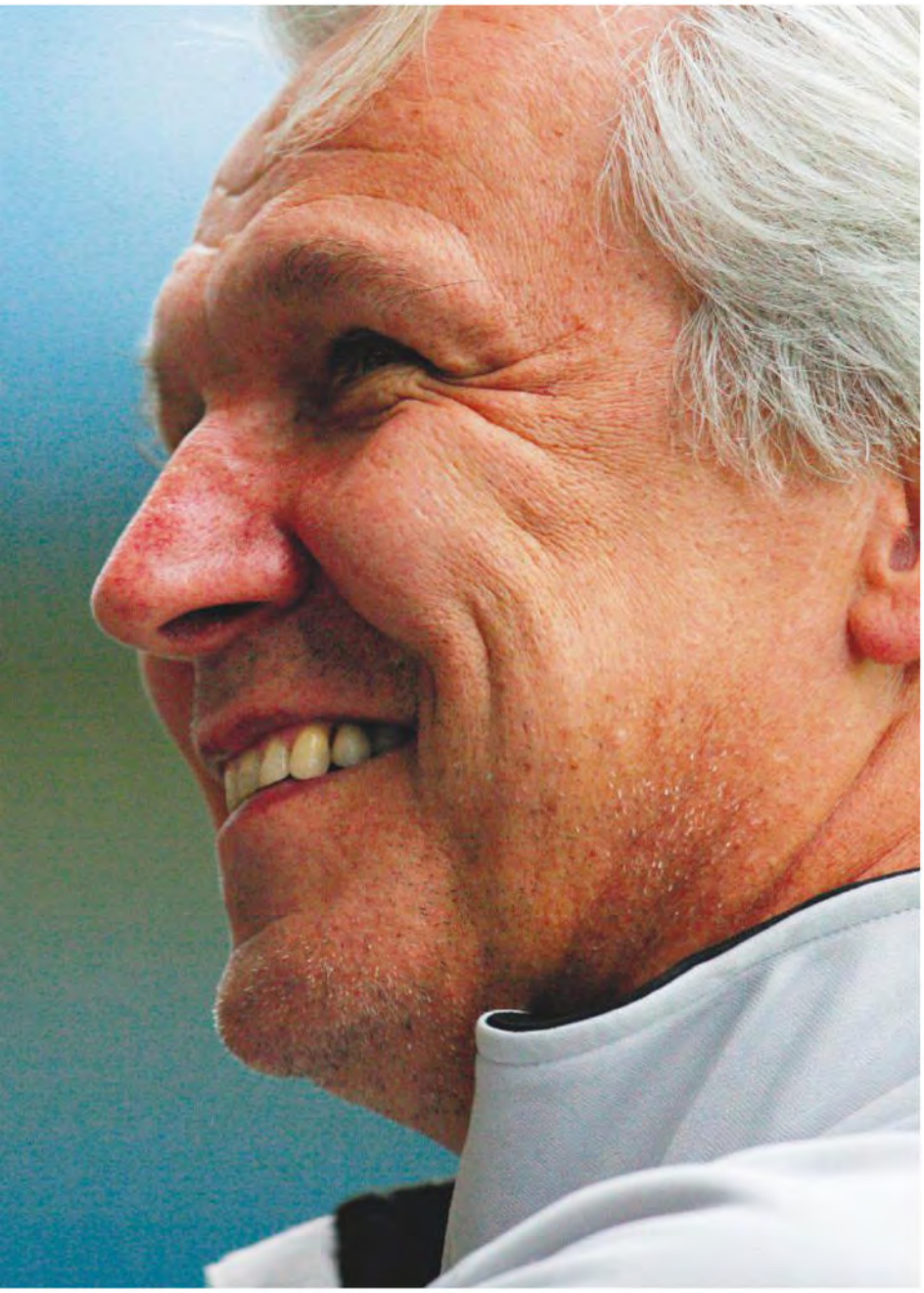
ARGENTINA: Lanus' 26-year-old defender Diego Barisone is killed in a traffic accident when his car collides with a truck on the highway between Rosario and Santa Fe.
CZECH REPUBLIC: Viktoria Plzen beat Maccabi Tel-Aviv 2-1 in Israel to set a competition record with a 13th successive win in the qualifying stage of the Champions League.
EGYPT: Zamalek are crowned Egyptian Premier League champions when nearest challengers Al Ahly can only draw 1-1 with Smouha.
UKRAINE: Shakhtar Donetsk coach Mircea Lucescu picks Fred for the goalless Champions League game away to Fenerbahce of Turkey despite a UEFA request that the midfielder be omitted after reports that the Brazilian failed a doping test during the Copa America.

Wednesday July 29

HOLLAND: Returning to the Austrian stadium in which they won the Champions League 20 years ago, Ajax squander a two-goal lead in this season's qualifiers to draw 2-2 with 10-man Rapid Vienna.
MEXICO: Tigres fail to make the most of home advantage in the first leg of the Libertadores Cup Final and are held to a goalless draw by River Plate of Argentina.

Thursday July 30

ALBANIA: Kukesi's Europa League game at home to Legia Warsaw is abandoned when the Polish club's defender Ondrej Duda is hit by a stone just after the visitors take a 2-1 lead.
SERBIA: Vojvodina cause a huge ➤



> "Some people think I resigned because of the terror attack but that is not so"
> Former Tunisia coach George Leekens

countries finished dead equal in the group phase.

Leekens, meanwhile, quit Tunisia in late June, just days after the gun attack on a beach in Sousse that killed 38 holidaymakers. He claimed he had not been paid a promised bonus from the Nations Cup, but the Tunisian federation had a different opinion about the validity of the bonus claim after the side lost in the quarter-finals to the host nation, albeit after a shocking refereeing decision and then a drama-filled penalty shoot-out.

Leekens has now quit two posts in African football rather hastily, having lasted only eight months with Algeria in 2003 and just over one year with Tunisia.

He said: "Some people think I resigned because of the terror attack but that is not so. It has nothing to do with the attack. I am not fleeing!

"There was a difference of opinion between the federation and myself about the bonuses from the Nations Cup. Four months after the tournament we still haven't been paid." WS

➤ upset in the Europa League, winning 4-0 away to Sampdoria.
SLOVAKIA: Matej Jelic makes it seven goals in five Europa League games this term as he finds the net again in a 2-0 victory against Vorskla Poltava of the Ukraine.

Friday *July 31*

ENGLAND: Theo Walcott signs a new four-year contract with Arsenal.

Saturday *August 1*

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain begin the new season by beating Lyon 2-0 in the French Super Cup.
GERMANY: Wolfsburg beat Bayern Munich on penalties to win the German Super Cup after a 1-1 draw.
SCOTLAND: Defending champions Celtic kick off the new league season with a 2-0 win against Ross County.
USA: Frank Lampard's makes a losing start to his MLS career as New York City are beaten 3-2 by Montreal Impact.

Sunday *August 2*

ENGLAND: Arsene Wenger begins his 20th season as manager of Arsenal by getting the better of Jose Mourinho for the first time in 14 attempts as his side beat Chelsea 1-0 in the Community Shield.
HOLLAND: PSV beat Groningen 3-0 to claim the Dutch Super Cup.
RUSSIA: Lokomotiv miss the chance to join Zenit and CSKA at the top of the Russian Premier League as they are held 1-1 by Dynamo in the Moscow derby.
TANZANIA: Azam beat Gor Mahia of Kenya 2-0 to win the CECAFA Championship – for East and Central African clubs – for the first time.

Monday *August 3*

ITALY: Juventus confirm new signing Sami Khedira from Real Madrid will be out of action for two months after suffering a thigh tear in Saturday's 2-0 friendly loss to Marseille.

Tuesday *August 4*

HOLLAND: Friday's opening fixture of the Eredivisie season, between Heerenveen and De Graafschap, is postponed due to a police strike.
POLAND: UEFA award Legia Warsaw a 3-0 win after their player was hit by stone thrown from the crowd during the Europa League game against Kukesi in Albania.

Wednesday *August 5*

ARGENTINA: After a goalless first leg, River Plate win 3-0 at home to Tigres of Mexico to claim a third Libertadores Cup. WS

Botswana

STEVE MENARY

Unavailable... Joel Mogorosi (in blue) can no longer be selected by Botswana

'Scams galore'

CEO forced out after discovering problems with FA finances

Keith Masters always meant to take a break from his job as chief executive of the Botswana Football Association (BFA) this summer – although not a permanent one. Now, however, their relationship is over.

A former referee, Masters spent 32 years as chief executive of the Kent FA, which a decade ago began to help develop the game in Botswana after he was contacted by the BFA's then president, Philip Makgalemele.

When that agreement ended in 2009, Masters continued going to Botswana twice a year at his own expense. After retiring in 2011, he was offered the post of BFA chief executive by new president Tebogo Sebego.

Masters was given a mandate to restore the BFA's finances and claims to have uncovered scams galore. But after Sebego turned against him, his position became untenable and he was forced to leave.

"Football in Botswana doesn't have a hope at the moment," says Masters. "The executive committee were impossible to deal with as some people knew nothing about the sport."

Public sector grants, particularly from the Botswana National Sports Council (BNSC), make up 86 per cent of BFA revenue according to Masters. The BNSC took the BFA to task over poor accounting, particularly over foreign trips by the national team, but Masters made enemies on the executive committee. He was even visited by the police, although no charges were brought.

"I was offered a couple of things I didn't take up that were clearly designed to set me up," he says. "I thought if they were prepared to go to those lengths to get me, what would they do next?" Ex-BNSC secretary Kagiso Kemoeng has replaced Masters and national coach Peter Butler admits: "It was all very political and Keith was a victim of circumstance."

A veteran English player and coach, Butler spent 13 years in Asian club management until last year when he was offered the BFA national coaching job. "Our league is a semi-pro environment," says Butler. "We have a lot of students. You think that's an advantage, but we have lads working in the diamond industry who get released. The students don't."

Butler has reduced the average age of the national team to 22 and will only select players from the 16-team Botswanan Premier League. No club has their own ground and wages are low compared to neighbouring South Africa, where Botswana internationals Mogakolodi Ngele and Kabelo Dembe play for Platinum Stars.

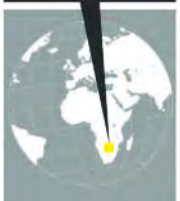
Mogogi Gabonamong and Joel Mogorosi were also with Bloemfontein Celtic, but Gabonamong returned home to join Township Rollers. Mogorosi, Ngele and Dembe cannot play for Botswana under the current policy but Butler has no regrets.

"For every one who has been against it, I've had three or four people come out in favour," he says. "There was a lot of bias in selection but not now.

"I have another 18 months on my contract. Whether I see it out remains to be seen. It depends how you judge success. Is it winning tournaments, or building from grass roots?"

Keith Masters wanted to build in Botswana too, but hit too many obstacles. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?



The British protectorate of Bechuanaland until its 1966 independence, diamonds make Botswana one of Africa's richest countries.

Size: 233,000 square miles
Population: 2.1 million
Capital: Gaborone
Languages: Setswana, Kalanga and English
Religion: Christian

Internationals

CONCACAF GOLD CUP FINALS

Played in the United States and Canada

Group A

July 7 - Frisco
Panama 1 (Quintero 56)
Haiti 1 (Nazon 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,357. **Ref:** Bejarano (CR)
Panama: Penedo - Machado, R Torres, Cummings, Henriquez, Pimentel (Camargo 84), Godoy, Gomez, Quintero, Perez, Tejada (Arroyo 67).
Haiti: Placide - Goreux, Jerome, Pierre, Jaggy, Alexandre, Marcelin (Millien 71), Alcenat (Maurice 71), Louis, Guerrier, Belfort (Nazon 80).

July 7 - Frisco
United States 2 (Dempsey 25, 64)
Honduras 1 (Discua 69)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 22,357. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)
United States: Guzan - Chandler (Evans 63), Alvarado, Brooks, Johnson, Yedlin, Beckerman, Zardes (Zusi 87), Bradley, Dempsey, Altidore (Wondolowski 59).
Honduras: Escober - H Figueroa (Hernandez 75), J Palacios, M Figueroa, Crisanto, A Mejia, Acosta, Beckeles, Martinez (Discua 69), Lozano, Najar (Quioto 63).

July10 - Foxborough
Honduras 1 (Najar 81)
Panama 1 (Tejada 21)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 46,720. **Ref:** Mejia (ESv)
Honduras: Escober - H Figueroa (Hernandez 63), J Palacios, M Figueroa, Crisanto, Claros, Acosta (Quioto 87), Beckeles, Discua (Martinez 63), Lozano, Najar.
Panama: Penedo - Machado, R Torres, Cummings, Henriquez, Cooper, Gomez (Arroyo 73), Godoy, Quintero (G Torres 88), Perez, Tejada (Pimentel 68). *Sent off: Henriquez 90+7.*

July10 - Foxborough
United States 1 (Dempsey 47)
Haiti 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 46,720. **Ref:** Montero (CR)
United States: Guzan - Evans, Gonzalez, Ream, Garza (Johnson 67), Zusi, Bradley, Diskerud, Dempsey, Johannsson (Beckerman 83), Altidore (Zardes 46).
Haiti: Placide - Goreux (Norde 83), Bertin, Jerome, Jaggy, Lafrance (Thuriere 71), Maurice (Louis 66), Alexandre, Marcelin, Guerrier, Nazon.

July13 - Kansas City
Haiti 1 (Nazon 14)
Honduras 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 18,467. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Haiti: Placide - Alcenat, Jerome, Bertin, Jaggy, Millien, Lafrance, Marcelin, Guerrier (Aveska 86), Belfort (Maurice 26), Nazon (Thuriere 68).
Honduras: Escober - Crisanto, J Palacios, M Figueroa, Beckeles, Martinez (Discua 66), Claros, A Mejia, Najar, Andino (Castillo 62), Lozano (Hernandez 46).

July13 - Kansas City
Panama 1 (Perez 34)
United States 1 (Bradley 55)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 18,467. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
Panama: Penedo - Cooper, R Torres, Cummings, Davis, Pimentel (Camargo 62), Gomez, Godoy, Quintero (Arroyo 86), Perez, Tejada (Nurse 71).
United States: Guzan - Chandler, Alvarado, Brooks, Johnson, Bedoya (Johannsson 71), Beckerman, Morales (Yedlin 46), Bradley, Wondolowski (Dempsey 46), Zardes.

GOLD CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USA (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Haiti (Q)	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Panama (Q)	3	0	3	0	3	3	3
Honduras	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Group B

July 8 - Carson
Costa Rica 2 (Miller 33, Ramirez 37)
Jamaica 2 (McCleary 13, McAnuff 48)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 22,648. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)
Costa Rica: Alvarado - Gamboa, Gonzalez, Miller, Diaz, Borges, Cubero, Campbell, B Ruiz (Aguilar 69), Venegas (Saborio 59), Ramirez (Vega 74).
Jamaica: Miller - Mariappa, Morgan, Taylor, Lawrence, McCleary, Austin, Watson, McAnuff (Laing 80), Dawkins, Barnes (Mattocks 61).

July 8 - Carson
El Salvador 0
Canada 0
Att: 22,648. **Ref:** Moncada (Hnd)
El Salvador: Carrillo - Garcia, Mendoza, Molina, Larin, Menjivar, D Ceren, Alvarez, Punyed (Renderos 86), Alas (Flores 73), Bonilla (Herrera 10).
Canada: Stamatopoulos - Ledgerwood, Edgar, Jakovic, De Jong, Piette (Tiebert 83), Straith, Bekker (Osorio 86), Ricketts, Larin (Haber 69), Akindele.

July11 - Houston
Jamaica 1 (Austin 90+2)
Canada 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,017. **Ref:** Martinez (Cub)
Jamaica: Miller - Mariappa, Morgan, Taylor, Lawrence, McCleary, Austin, Watson, McAnuff, Dawkins (Mattocks 65), Barnes.
Canada: Stamatopoulos - Ledgerwood, Edgar, Jakovic, De Jong, Straith, Ricketts, De Guzman, Piette (Hainault 80), Akindele (Teibert 71), Larin (Haber 46).

July11 - Houston
Costa Rica 1 (B Ruiz 61)
El Salvador 1 (Corea 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,017. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Costa Rica: Alvarado - Myrie, Gonzalez, Miller, Calvo, Guzman, Borges, Campbell (Venegas 54), B Ruiz, Ramirez (Aguilar 65), Saborio (Umana 77).
El Salvador: Carrillo - Garcia, Mendoza, Molina, Larin, Menjivar, D Ceren, Alvarez, Punyed (Corea 71), Alas (Henriquez 78), Herrera (Burgos 66).

July14 - Toronto
Jamaica 1 (McCleary 72)
El Salvador 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 16,674. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
Jamaica: Miller (Thompson 24) - Mariappa, Morgan, Taylor (Hector 9), Lawrence, Watson, Austin, McCleary, Barnes (Powell 70), McAnuff, Mattocks. *Sent off: Mattocks 81.*
El Salvador: Carrillo - Garcia, Mendoza (Corea 77), Molina, Larin, D Ceren, Menjivar, Flores (Alvarez 62), Punyed, Alas, Herrera (Bonilla 62).

July14 - Toronto
Canada 0
Costa Rica 0
Att: 16,674. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Hnd)
Canada: Stamatopoulos - Ouimette, Edgar, Jakovic, De Jong, Straith, Ricketts (Teibert 67), De Guzman, Osorio (Hainault 69), Tissot (Larin 68), Haber.
Costa Rica: Alvarado - Gamboa, Gonzalez, Calvo, Diaz, Guzman (Cubero 82), Borges, Vega (Miller 74), B Ruiz, Venegas, Ramirez (Campbell 77).

GOLD CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jamaica (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Costa Rica (Q)	3	0	3	0	3	3	3
El Salvador	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Canada	3	0	2	1	0	1	2

Group C

July 9 - Chicago
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (Bateau 11, Cato 14, J Jones 25)
Guatemala 1 (Ruiz 62)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 54,126. **Ref:** Pitti (Pan)
Trinidad & Tobago: J-M Williams - Cyrus, Abu Bakr, Bateau, David, Cato, Hyland (Boucaud 77), George, J Jones (Peltier 80), Guerra (Plaza 63), K Jones.
Guatemala: Jerez - Lalin, Vasquez, Hernandez, Herrarte (Chinchilla 70), Aparicio, Marquez (M Lopez 46), Cincotta (Mejia 46), Contreras, Ruiz, Pappa.

July 9 - Chicago
Mexico 6 (Peralta 17, 37, 62, Vela 22, Guardado 44, G Dos Santos 75)
Cuba 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 54,126. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar, Rodriguez, Reyes, Layun, Rios, H Herrera, J Dos Santos (G Dos Santos 57), Guardado (Esquivel 72), Vela (J M Corona 72), Peralta.
Cuba: D Guerra - Napoles, Dranguet, Marquez, Lopez, Corrales (L Perez 80), F Guerra (Horta 67), Clavelo, Gomez, Ariel Martinez, Coroneaux (Suarez 55).

July12 - Glendale
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (Bateau 17, Boucaud 42)
Cuba 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 62,910. **Ref:** Gantar (Can)
Trinidad & Tobago: J-M Williams (Phillip 46) - Cyrus, Abu Bakr, Bateau, M Williams, Peltier (Cato 82), George, Boucaud, J Jones, Guerra (Cummings 68), K Jones.
Cuba: D Guerra - Vaquero, Diz, Marquez, Napoles, Luis (Dranguet 80), Clavelo, Gomez (L Perez 69), Cervantes (Suarez 62), Ariel Martinez, Reyes.

July12 - Glendale
Guatemala 0
Mexico 0
Att: 62,910. **Ref:** Castro (Hnd)
Guatemala: Motta - D Lopez, Lalin, Vasquez, Ruben Morales, Hernandez (Cincotta 83), Contreras, Aparicio, De Leon, Ruiz (Pappa 78), M Lopez (Chinchilla 88). *Sent off: Contreras 76.*
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar (G Dos Santos 83), Reyes, Rodriguez, Layun, Guardado, H Herrera, J Dos Santos (Javier Orozco 87), Vazquez (Esquivel 67), Vela, Peralta.

July15 - Charlotte
Cuba 1 (Reyes 73)
Guatemala 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 55,823. **Ref:** Bonilla (ESv)
Cuba: D Guerra - Vaquero, Diz, Marquez, Napoles, Luis (Dranguet 68), Clavelo, Ariel Martinez, Gomez (L Perez 87), Corrales (Cervantes 61), Reyes.
Guatemala: Motta - D Lopez, Lalin (Figueroa 46), Vasquez, Ruben Morales, Mejia, Pappa, De Leon (Cincotta 61), Aparicio, Ruiz, M Lopez (Chinchilla 68).

July15 - Charlotte
Mexico 4 (Aguilar 32, Vela 51, Guardado 88, K Jones og 90)
Trinidad & Tobago 4 (Cummings 55, 67, K Jones 58, Marshall 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 55,823. **Ref:** Geiger (USA)
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar, Reyes, Rodriguez, Y Corona (Esquivel 78), Layun, H Herrera, J Dos Santos (J M Corona 66), Guardado, G Dos Santos (Peralta 46), Vela.
Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip - David, Marshall, Bateau, M Williams, George, Hyland (James 78), Cato, Cummings (Plaza 89), J Jones, K Jones.

GOLD CUP – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Trinidad & T (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	5	7
Mexico (Q)	3	1	2	0	10	4	5
Cuba (Q)	3	1	0	2	1	8	3
Guatemala	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

● *Top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with the best record qualified for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals

July18 - Baltimore
United States 6 (Dempsey 4, pen 64, 78, Zardes 15, Johannsson 32, Gonzalez 45)
Cuba 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 37,994. **Ref:** Bejarano (CR)
United States: Guzan - Chandler (Evans 46), Gonzalez, Alvarado, Johnson (Yedlin 67), Zardes, Beckerman (Corona 46), Bedoya, Bradley, Johannsson, Dempsey.
Cuba: D Guerra - Vaquero, Diz, Horta, Napoles, Luis (Lopez 70), Clavelo, L Perez (Coroneaux 57), Gomez (F Guerra 75), Corrales, Reyes.

July18 - Baltimore
Haiti 0
Jamaica 1 (Barnes 7)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 37,994. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)
Haiti: Placide - Alcenat, Jerome, Bertin, Jaggy, Guerrier (Millien 71), Marcelin, Alexandre (Norde 84), Lafrance, Maurice, Nazon (Belfort 71).
Jamaica: Thompson - Mariappa, Morgan, Hector, Lawrence, McCleary, Austin, McAnuff, Grant (Laing 54), Dawkins (Humphrey 87), Barnes (Clennon 90+2).

July19 - East Rutherford
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (K Jones 54)
Panama 1 (Tejada 37)
Panama 6-5 on pens
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 74,187.
Ref: Rodriguez (Hnd)
Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip - Cyrus, Abu Bakr, Bateau, M Williams, Cato (Peltier 66), Hyland (Guerra 90), George, J Jones, Cummings (Boucaud 81), K Jones.
Panama: Penedo - Cooper, R Torres, Cummings, Davis, Pimentel, Camargo (Arroyo 90+2), Gomez (Machado 46), Quintero, Perez, Tejada (G Torres 83).

July19 - East Rutherford
Mexico 1 (Guardado pen 120+4)
Costa Rica 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0. **Att:** 74,187.
Ref: Lopez (Gtm)
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar, Reyes, Rodriguez, Y Corona (Alanis 90+2), Layun, H Herrera (Esquivel 61), J Dos Santos, Guardado, Vela (J M Corona 86), Peralta.
Costa Rica: Alvarado - Gamboa (Myrie 97), Gonzalez, Calvo, Diaz, Campbell, Borges, Cubero, Venegas, B Ruiz (Miller 79), Ramirez (Aguilar 62).

Semi-finals

July 22 - Atlanta
United States 1 (Bradley 48)
Jamaica 2 (Mattocks 31, Barnes 36)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 70,511. **Ref:** Montero (CR)
United States: Guzan - Evans, Alvarado, Brooks, Johnson, Beckerman (Diskerud 67), Bradley, Zardes, Dempsey, Bedoya (Yedlin 78), Johannsson (Gordon 73).
Jamaica: Thompson - Mariappa, Hector, Morgan, Lawrence, McCleary (Grant 90+3), Austin, Watson, McAnuff, Mattocks (Dawkins 57), Barnes (Humphrey 85).

July 22 - Atlanta
Panama 1 (R Torres 57)
Mexico 2 (Guardado pen 90+10, pen 105+1)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 70,511.
Ref: Geiger (USA)
Panama: Penedo - Machado, R Torres, Cummings, Davis, Cooper, Pimentel (Henriquez 87; Stephens 109), Godoy, Quintero, Tejada, Nurse (Arroyo 79). *Sent off: Tejada 25.*
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar, Reyes, Rodriguez, Alanis (Esquivel 46), Layun (Javier Orozco 77), H Herrera (J M Corona 59), J Dos Santos, Guardado, Peralta, Vela.

3rd-place match

July 25 - Chester
United States 1 (Dempsey 70)
Panama 1 (Nurse 55)
Panama 3-2 on pens
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 12,598.
Ref: Moncada (Hnd)
United States: Guzan - Chandler, Gonzalez (Beasley 90), Brooks, Ream, Zusi (Yedlin 60), Corona, Bradley, Johnson, Johannsson, Wondolowski (Dempsey 60).
Panama: Mejia - Machado, R Torres, Cummings, Davis, Camargo (Stephens 46; Pinzon 90), Cooper, Godoy, Quintero, Nurse, Blackburn (Arroyo 88).

Final

July 26 - Philadelphia
Jamaica 1 (Mattocks 80)
Mexico 3 (Guardado 31, J M Corona 47, Peralta 61)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 68,930. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Jamaica: Thompson - Mariappa, Morgan, Hector, Lawrence, McCleary (Mattocks 60), Austin, Watson (Seaton 90), McAnuff, Dawkins (Humphrey 74), Barnes.
Mexico: Ochoa - Aguilar, Reyes, Rodriguez, Alanis, Layun, Duenas (Javier Orozco 86), J Dos Santos, Guardado (Torres Nilo 62), J M Corona (Esquivel 82), Peralta.

Previous winners (most recent)

2005	United States
2007	United States
2009	Mexico
2011	Mexico
2013	United States

FRIENDLIES

July 6 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (Msowoya 90)
Uganda 0
HT: 0-0

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA section

● *5 finals places available*

1st round draw

(for the 26 lowest-ranked countries)

Central African Republic v Madagascar
Chad v Sierra Leone
Comoros v Lesotho
Djibouti v Swaziland
Eritrea v Botswana
Gambia v Namibia
Liberia v Guinea-Bissau
Mauritius v Kenya
Sao Tome e Principe v Ethiopia
Seychelles v Burundi
Somalia v Niger
South Sudan v Mauritania
Tanzania v Malawi
1st & 2nd legs - Oct 5-13, 2015

2nd round draw

(the remaining 27 countries enter at this stage)

Angola v South Africa
Benin v Burkina Faso
Libya v Rwanda
Morocco v Equatorial Guinea
Mozambique v Gabon
Sudan v Zambia
Togo v Uganda
Central African Rep OR Madagascar v **Senegal**
Chad OR Sierra Leone v **Egypt**
Comoros OR Lesotho v **Ghana**
Djibouti OR Swaziland v **Nigeria**
Eritrea OR Botswana v **Mali**
Gambia OR Namibia v **Guinea**
Liberia OR Guinea-Bissau v **Ivory Coast**
Mauritius OR Kenya v **Cape Verde Islands**
Sao Tome e Principe OR Ethiopia v **Congo**
Seychelles OR Burundi v **DR Congo**
Somalia OR Niger v **Cameroon**
South Sudan OR Mauritania v **Tunisia**
Tanzania OR Malawi v **Algeria**
1st & 2nd legs - Nov 9-17, 2015

3rd round

The 20 qualifiers will be drawn into 5 4-team groups (ties to be played Oct 2016-Nov 2017)

● *The 5 group winners will qualify for the finals*

ASIA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

1st round

(for the 12 lowest-ranked countries)
1st legs - Mar12; 2nd legs - Mar17/23, 2015
Cambodia v Macau 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)
East Timor v Mongolia 4-1, 1-0 (agg 5-1)
India v Nepal 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Sri Lanka v Bhutan 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Taiwan v Brunei 0-1, 2-0 (agg 2-1)
Yemen v Pakistan 3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1)

2nd round

(the remaining 34 countries entered at this stage; ties to be played May 2015-Mar 2016)

Group A
June 11: Malaysia 1 East Timor 1; Saudi Arabia 3 Palestine 2.
June 15: East Timor 0 United Arab Emirates 1; Malaysia 0 Palestine 6.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palestine	2	1	0	1	8	3	3
Saudi Arabia	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
UAE	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
East Timor	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Malaysia	2	0	1	1	1	7	1

Group B
June 11: Bangladesh 1 Kyrgyzstan 3; Tajikistan 1 Jordan 3.
June 16: Bangladesh 1 Tajikistan 1; Kyrgyzstan 1 Australia 2.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Kyrgyzstan	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Australia	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Tajikistan	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Bangladesh	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Group C
June 11: Hong Kong 7 Bhutan 0; Maldives 0 Qatar 1.
June 16: Bhutan 0 China 6; Hong Kong 2 Maldives 0.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hong Kong	2	2	0	0	9	0	6
China	1	1	0	0	6	0	3
Qatar	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Maldives	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Bhutan	2	0	0	2	0	13	0

Group D
June 11: Guam 1 Turkmenistan 0; India 1 Oman 2.
June 16: Guam 2 India 1; Turkmenistan 1 Iran 1.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guam	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Oman	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Iran	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Turkmenistan	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
India	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Group E
June 11: Afghanistan 0 Syria 6; Cambodia 0 Singapore 4.
June 16: Cambodia 0 Afghanistan 1; Japan 0 Singapore 0.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Singapore	2	1	1	0	4	0	4
Syria	1	1	0	0	6	0	3
Afghanistan	2	1	0	1	1	6	3
Japan	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cambodia	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group F
May 24: Thailand 1 Vietnam 0.
June 16: Taiwan 0 Thailand 2.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thailand	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vietnam	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Taiwan	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Indonesia excluded after being suspended by FIFA for government interference in the national FA

Group G
June 11: Laos 2 Myanmar 2; Lebanon 0 Kuwait 1.
June 16: Laos 0 Lebanon 2; Myanmar 0 South Korea 2.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Lebanon	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Kuwait	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Myanmar	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Laos	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Group H
June 11: Philippines 2 Bahrain 1; Yemen 0 North Korea 3 (awarded).
June 16: North Korea 4 Uzbekistan 2; Yemen 0 Philippines 2.

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND ROUND: GP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
North Korea	2	2	0	0	7	2	6
Philippines	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Bahrain	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1	2	4	0
Yemen	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

● *The 8 group winners and the 4 runners-up with the best record will qualify for the 3rd round*

3rd round

The 12 qualifiers will be drawn into 2 6-team groups (ties to be played Aug 2016-Sep 2017)

● *The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals; the 2 3rd-placed countries will meet in the Asia section play-off, the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed Concacaf country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

1st round

(for the 14 lowest-ranked countries)
1st legs - Mar 22-27; 2nd legs - Mar 26-31, 2015
Bahamas v Bermuda 0-5, 0-3 (agg 0-8)
Barbados v US Virgin Islands 0-1, 4-0 (agg 4-1)
Belize v Cayman Islands
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Belize on away goals)
British Virgin Islands v Dominica 2-3, 0-0 (agg 2-3)
Curacao v Montserrat 2-1, 2-2 (agg 4-3)
Nicaragua v Anguilla 5-0, 3-0 (agg 8-0)
St Kitts & Nevis v Turks & Caicos 6-2, 6-2 (agg 12-4)

2nd round

(the 13 next lowest-ranked countries entered at this stage)
1st legs - June 7-12; 2nd legs - June14-16, 2015
Antigua & Barbuda v St Lucia 1-3, 4-1 (agg 5-4)
Aruba v Barbados 0-2, 3-0 (awarded) (agg 3-2)
Curacao v Cuba
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Curacao on away goals)
Dominica v Canada 0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)
Dominican Republic v Belize 1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5)
Guatemala v Bermuda 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Nicaragua v Surinam 1-0, 3-1 (agg 4-1)
Puerto Rico v Grenada 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
St Kitts & Nevis v El Salvador 2-2, 1-4 (agg 3-6)
St Vincent & The Grenadines v Guyana
2-2, 4-4 (agg 6-6, St Vincent on away goals)

3rd round draw

(the 2 next lowest-ranked countries enter at this stage)

Antigua & Barbuda v Guatemala
Canada v Belize
Curacao v El Salvador
Grenada v Haiti
Jamaica v Nicaragua
St Vincent & The Grenadines v Aruba
1st & 2nd legs - Aug 31-Sep 8, 2015

4th round draw

(the remaining 6 countries enter at this stage; ties to be played Nov 2015-Sep 2016)

Group A
Honduras, Mexico, *Canada OR Belize, Curacao OR El Salvador*

Group B
Costa Rica, Panama, *Grenada OR Haiti, Jamaica OR Nicaragua*

Group C
Trinidad & Tobago, United States, *Antigua & Barbuda OR Guatemala, St Vincent & The Grenadines OR Aruba*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 5th round*

5th round

The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (ties to be played Nov 2016-Oct 2017)

● *The top 3 will qualify for the finals; the 4th-placed country will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a play-off for a place in the finals*

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts* **Russia**, *who qualify automatically)*

Draw

(ties to be played Sep 2016-Oct 2017)

Group A
Belarus, Bulgaria, France, Holland, Luxembourg, Sweden

Group B
Andorra, Faroe Islands, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Switzerland

Group C
Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Germany, Northern Ireland, Norway, San Marino

Group D
Austria, Georgia, Moldova, Republic of Ireland, Serbia, Wales

Group E
Armenia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Poland, Romania

Group F
England, Lithuania, Malta, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia

Group G
Albania, Israel, Italy, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Spain

Group H
Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece

Group I
Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Turkey, Ukraine

● *The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals*

OCEANIA section

● *0.5 finals places available*

1st round

(for the 4 lowest-ranked countries, forming a single group; ties to be played Aug-Sep 2015)

American Samoa, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga

● *The group winner will qualify for the 2nd round*

2nd round draw

(the remaining 7 countries enter at this stage; ties to be played May 2016-June 2016)

Group A
New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, *1st round group winner*

Group B
Fiji, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

● *The top 3 in each group will qualify for the 3rd round*

3rd round

The 6 qualifiers will be drawn into 2 3-team groups (ties to be played Mar 2017-Oct 2017)

● *The 2 group winners will qualify for the play-off round*

Play-off round

The 2 qualifiers will meet in a play-off (ties to be played in Oct 2017)

● *The play-off round winner will meet the 5th-placed South American country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

The 10 confederation members will form a single group (ties to be played Oct 2015-Oct 2017)

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

● *The top 4 will qualify for the finals; the 5th-placed country will meet the Oceania play-off round winner in a play-off for a place in the finals*

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS

Group A

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iceland	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Czech Rep	6	4	1	1	12	8	13
Holland	6	3	1	2	13	6	10
Turkey	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Latvia	6	0	3	3	2	13	3
Kazakhstan	6	0	1	5	4	14	1

2014		
Sep 9	Czech Republic v Holland	2-1
	Iceland v Turkey	3-0
	Kazakhstan v Latvia	0-0
Oct 10	Holland v Kazakhstan	3-1
	Latvia v Iceland	0-3
	Turkey v Czech Republic	1-2
Oct 13	Iceland v Holland	2-0
	Kazakhstan v Czech Republic	2-4
	Latvia v Turkey	1-1
Nov 16	Czech Republic v Iceland	2-1
	Holland v Latvia	6-0
	Turkey v Kazakhstan	3-1
2015		
Mar 28	Czech Republic v Latvia	1-1
	Holland v Turkey	1-1
	Kazakhstan v Iceland	0-3
Jun 12	Iceland v Czech Republic	2-1
	Kazakhstan v Turkey	0-1
	Latvia v Holland	0-2
Sep 3	Czech Republic v Kazakhstan	
	Holland v Iceland	
	Turkey v Latvia	
Sep 6	Iceland v Kazakhstan	
	Latvia v Czech Republic	
	Turkey v Holland	
Oct 10	Czech Republic v Turkey	
	Iceland v Latvia	
	Kazakhstan v Holland	
Oct 13	Holland v Czech Republic	
	Latvia v Kazakhstan	
	Turkey v Iceland	

Group B

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wales	6	4	2	0	8	2	14
Belgium	6	3	2	1	13	2	11
Israel	6	3	0	3	10	9	9
Cyprus	6	3	0	3	12	11	9
Bosnia-Herz	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Andorra	6	0	0	6	3	23	0

2014
Sep 9 Andorra v Wales 1-2
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Cyprus 1-2
Oct 10 Belgium v Andorra 6-0
Cyprus v Israel 1-2
Wales v Bosnia-Herzegovina 0-0
Oct 13 Andorra v Israel 1-4
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Belgium 1-1
Wales v Cyprus 2-1
Nov 16 Belgium v Wales 0-0
Cyprus v Andorra 5-0
Israel v Bosnia-Herzegovina 3-0
2015
Mar 28 Andorra v Bosnia-Herzegovina 0-3
Belgium v Cyprus 5-0
Israel v Wales 0-3
Mar 31 Israel v Belgium 0-1
Jun 12 Andorra v Cyprus 1-3
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Israel 3-1
Wales v Belgium 1-0
Sep 3 Belgium v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Cyprus v Wales
Israel v Andorra
Sep 6 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Andorra
Cyprus v Belgium
Wales v Israel
Oct 10 Andorra v Belgium
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Wales
Israel v Cyprus
Oct 13 Belgium v Israel
Cyprus v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Wales v Andorra

Group C

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	6	6	0	0	13	3	18
Spain	6	5	0	1	15	3	15
Ukraine	6	4	0	2	9	2	12
Belarus	6	1	1	4	4	11	4
Macedonia	6	1	0	5	6	14	3
Luxembourg	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

2014
Sep 8 Luxembourg v Belarus 1-1
Spain v Macedonia 5-1
Ukraine v Slovakia 0-1
Oct 9 Belarus v Ukraine 0-2
Macedonia v Luxembourg 3-2
Slovakia v Spain 2-1
Oct 12 Belarus v Slovakia 1-3
Luxembourg v Spain 0-4
Ukraine v Macedonia 1-0
Nov 15 Luxembourg v Ukraine 0-3
Macedonia v Slovakia 0-2
Spain v Belarus 3-0
2015
Mar 27 Macedonia v Belarus 1-2
Slovakia v Luxembourg 3-0
Spain v Ukraine 1-0
Jun 14 Belarus v Spain 0-1
Slovakia v Macedonia 2-1
Ukraine v Luxembourg 3-0
Sep 5 Luxembourg v Macedonia
Spain v Slovakia
Ukraine v Belarus
Sep 8 Belarus v Luxembourg
Macedonia v Spain
Slovakia v Ukraine
Oct 9 Macedonia v Ukraine
Slovakia v Belarus
Spain v Luxembourg
Oct 12 Belarus v Macedonia
Luxembourg v Slovakia
Ukraine v Spain

Group D

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	6	4	2	0	20	3	14
Germany	6	4	1	1	16	4	13
Scotland	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
Rep Ireland	6	2	3	1	12	5	9
Georgia	6	1	0	5	4	13	3
Gibraltar	6	0	0	6	1	34	0

2014
Sep 7 Georgia v Republic of Ireland 1-2
Germany v Scotland 2-1
Gibraltar v Poland 0-7
Oct 11 Poland v Germany 2-0
Republic of Ireland v Gibraltar 7-0
Scotland v Georgia 1-0
Oct 14 Germany v Republic of Ireland 1-1
Gibraltar v Georgia 0-3
Poland v Scotland 2-2
Nov 14 Georgia v Poland 0-4
Germany v Gibraltar 4-0
Scotland v Republic of Ireland 1-0
2015
Mar 29 Georgia v Germany 0-2
Republic of Ireland v Poland 1-1
Scotland v Gibraltar 6-1
Jun 13 Gibraltar v Germany 0-7
Poland v Georgia 4-0
Republic of Ireland v Scotland 1-1
Sep 4 Georgia v Scotland
Germany v Poland
Gibraltar v Republic of Ireland
Sep 7 Poland v Gibraltar
Republic of Ireland v Georgia
Scotland v Germany
Oct 8 Georgia v Gibraltar
Republic of Ireland v Germany
Scotland v Poland
Oct 11 Germany v Georgia
Gibraltar v Scotland
Poland v Republic of Ireland

Group E

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	6	6	0	0	18	3	18
Switzerland	6	4	0	2	13	4	12
Slovenia	6	3	0	3	12	7	9
Estonia	6	2	1	3	3	5	7
Lithuania	6	2	0	4	4	12	6
San Marino	6	0	1	5	0	19	1

2014
Sep 8 Estonia v Slovenia 1-0
San Marino v Lithuania 0-2
Switzerland v England 0-2
Oct 9 England v San Marino 5-0
Lithuania v Estonia 1-0
Slovenia v Switzerland 1-0
Oct 12 Estonia v England 0-1
Lithuania v Slovenia 0-2
Oct 14 San Marino v Switzerland 0-4
Nov 15 England v Slovenia 3-1
San Marino v Estonia 0-0
Switzerland v Lithuania 4-0
2015
Mar 27 England v Lithuania 4-0
Slovenia v San Marino 6-0
Switzerland v Estonia 3-0
Jun 14 Estonia v San Marino 2-0
Lithuania v Switzerland 1-2
Slovenia v England 2-3
Sep 5 Estonia v Lithuania
San Marino v England
Switzerland v Slovenia
Sep 8 England v Switzerland
Lithuania v San Marino
Slovenia v Estonia
Oct 9 England v Estonia
Slovenia v Lithuania
Switzerland v San Marino
Oct 12 Estonia v Switzerland
Lithuania v England
San Marino v Slovenia

Group F

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania	6	4	2	0	7	1	14
N Ireland	6	4	1	1	8	4	13
Hungary	6	3	2	1	5	3	11
Faroe Islands	6	2	0	4	4	8	6
Finland	6	1	1	4	5	8	4
Greece	6	0	2	4	2	7	2

2014
Sep 7 Faroe Islands v Finland 1-3
Greece v Romania 0-1
Hungary v Northern Ireland 1-2
Oct 11 Finland v Greece 1-1
Northern Ireland v Faroe Islands 2-0
Romania v Hungary 1-1
Oct 14 Faroe Islands v Hungary 0-1
Finland v Romania 0-2
Greece v Northern Ireland 0-2
Nov 14 Greece v Faroe Islands 0-1
Hungary v Finland 1-0
Romania v Northern Ireland 2-0
2015
Mar 29 Hungary v Greece 0-0
Northern Ireland v Finland 2-1
Romania v Faroe Islands 1-0
Jun 13 Faroe Islands v Greece 2-1
Finland v Hungary 0-1
Northern Ireland v Romania 0-0
Sep 4 Faroe Islands v Northern Ireland
Greece v Finland
Hungary v Romania
Sep 7 Finland v Faroe Islands
Northern Ireland v Hungary
Romania v Greece
Oct 8 Hungary v Faroe Islands
Northern Ireland v Greece
Romania v Finland
Oct 11 Faroe Islands v Romania
Finland v Northern Ireland
Greece v Hungary

Group G

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria	6	5	1	0	11	2	16
Sweden	6	3	3	0	10	4	12
Russia	6	2	2	2	9	4	8
Montenegro	6	1	2	3	4	8	5
Liechtenstein	6	1	2	3	2	12	5
Moldova	6	0	2	4	3	9	2

2014
Sep 8 Austria v Sweden 1-1
Montenegro v Moldova 2-0
Russia v Liechtenstein 4-0
Oct 9 Liechtenstein v Montenegro 0-0
Moldova v Austria 1-2
Sweden v Russia 1-1
Oct 12 Austria v Montenegro 1-0
Russia v Moldova 1-1
Sweden v Liechtenstein 2-0
Nov 15 Austria v Russia 1-0
Moldova v Liechtenstein 0-1
Montenegro v Sweden 1-1
2015
Mar 27 Liechtenstein v Austria 0-5
Moldova v Sweden 0-2
Montenegro v Russia (awarded) 0-3
Jun 14 Liechtenstein v Moldova 1-1
Russia v Austria 0-1
Sweden v Montenegro 3-1
Sep 5 Austria v Moldova
Montenegro v Liechtenstein
Russia v Sweden
Sep 8 Liechtenstein v Russia
Moldova v Montenegro
Sweden v Austria
Oct 9 Liechtenstein v Sweden
Moldova v Russia
Montenegro v Austria
Oct 12 Austria v Liechtenstein
Russia v Montenegro
Sweden v Moldova

Group H

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia[1]	6	4	2	0	16	3	13
Italy	6	3	3	0	9	5	12
Norway	6	3	1	2	7	8	10
Bulgaria	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Azerbaijan	6	1	1	4	4	11	4
Malta	6	0	1	5	1	10	1

[1] *1pt deducted after a swastika was painted on the pitch before the home game against Italy*

2014
Sep 9 Azerbaijan v Bulgaria 1-2
Croatia v Malta 2-0
Norway v Italy 0-2
Oct 10 Bulgaria v Croatia 0-1
Italy v Azerbaijan 2-1
Malta v Norway 0-3
Oct 13 Croatia v Azerbaijan 6-0
Malta v Italy 0-1
Norway v Bulgaria 2-1
Nov 16 Azerbaijan v Norway 0-1
Bulgaria v Malta 1-1
Italy v Croatia 1-1
2015
Mar 28 Azerbaijan v Malta 2-0
Bulgaria v Italy 2-2
Croatia v Norway 5-1
Jun 12 Croatia v Italy 1-1
Malta v Bulgaria 0-1
Norway v Azerbaijan 0-0
Sep 3 Azerbaijan v Croatia
Bulgaria v Norway
Italy v Malta
Sep 6 Italy v Bulgaria
Malta v Azerbaijan
Norway v Croatia
Oct 10 Azerbaijan v Italy
Croatia v Bulgaria
Norway v Malta
Oct 13 Bulgaria v Azerbaijan
Italy v Norway
Malta v Croatia

Group I

EURO 2016 QUALIFIERS – GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	5	4	0	1	7	4	12
Denmark	5	3	1	1	8	4	10
Albania	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Armenia	5	0	1	4	5	9	1
Serbia[1]	5	0	1	4	3	11	-2

[1] *3pts deducted for the fan violence that led to the abandonment of the home game against Albania*

2014
Sep 7 Denmark v Armenia 2-1
Portugal v Albania 0-1
Oct 11 Albania v Denmark 1-1
Armenia v Serbia 1-1
Oct 14 Denmark v Portugal 0-1
Serbia v Albania (awarded) 0-3
Nov 14 Portugal v Armenia 1-0
Serbia v Denmark 1-3
2015
Mar 29 Albania v Armenia 2-1
Portugal v Serbia 2-1
Jun 13 Armenia v Portugal 2-3
Denmark v Serbia 2-0
Sep 4 Denmark v Albania
Serbia v Armenia
Sep 7 Albania v Portugal
Armenia v Denmark
Oct 8 Albania v Serbia
Portugal v Denmark
Oct 11 Armenia v Albania
Serbia v Portugal

● *The top 2 in each group and the 3rd-placed team with the best record will qualify for the 24-team finals; the other 8 3rd-placed teams will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals. Hosts France qualify automatically*

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Group A

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	1	1	0	0	8	1	3
Togo	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Liberia	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Djibouti	1	0	0	1	1	8	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Djibouti v Togo; Liberia v Tunisia
2016
Mar 23-26 Djibouti v Liberia; Tunisia v Togo
Mar 26-29 Liberia v Djibouti; Togo v Tunisia
Jun 3-5 Djibouti v Tunisia; Liberia v Togo
Sep 2-4 Togo v Djibouti; Tunisia v Liberia

Group B

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
DR Congo	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Madagascar	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Cent Af Rep	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 CAR v DR Congo; Mad'car v Angola
2016
Mar 23-26 DR Congo v Angola; Mad'car v CAR
Mar 26-29 Angola v DR Congo; CAR v Mad'car
Jun 3-5 CAR v Angola; Mad'car v DR Congo
Sep 2-4 Angola v Mad'car; DR Congo v CAR

Group C

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Benin	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Equat Guinea	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
South Sudan	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Benin v Mali; S Sudan v Eq Guinea
2016
Mar 23-26 Mali v Eq Guinea; S Sudan v Benin
Mar 26-29 Benin v S Sudan; Eq Guinea v Mali
Jun 3-5 Benin v Eq Guinea; S Sudan v Mali
Sep 2-4 Eq Guinea v S Sudan; Mali v Benin

Group D

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Uganda	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Botswana	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Comoros	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Botswana v B Faso; Com's v Uganda
2016
Mar 23-26 B Faso v Uganda; Com's v Botswana
Mar 26-29 Botswana v Com's; Uganda v B Faso
Jun 3-5 Botswana v Uganda; Com's v B Faso
Sep 2-4 B Faso v Botswana; Uganda v Com's

Group E

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kenya	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Congo	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Guinea-Bissau	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Zambia	1	0	1	0	0	0	1

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 G-Bissau v Congo; Kenya v Zambia
2016
Mar 23-26 G-Bissau v Kenya; Zambia v Congo
Mar 26-29 Congo v Zambia; Kenya v G-Bissau
Jun 3-5 G-Bissau v Zambia; Kenya v Congo
Sep 2-4 Congo v G-Bissau; Zambia v Kenya

Group F

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cape Verde	1	1	0	0	7	1	3
Morocco	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Libya	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sao Tome	1	0	0	1	1	7	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Libya v C Verde; S Tome v Morocco
2016
Mar 23-26 C Verde v Morocco; S Tome v Libya
Mar 26-29 Libya v S Tome; Morocco v C Verde
Jun 3-5 Libya v Morocco; S Tome v C Verde
Sep 2-4 C Verde v Libya; Morocco v S Tome

Group G

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Nigeria	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Chad	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Tanzania	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Chad v Egypt; Tanzania v Nigeria
2016
Mar 23-26 Chad v Tanzania; Nigeria v Egypt
Mar 26-29 Egypt v Nigeria; Tanzania v Chad
Jun 3-5 Chad v Nigeria; Tanzania v Egypt
Sep 2-4 Egypt v Chad; Nigeria v Tanzania

Group H

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	1	1	0	0	7	1	3
Rwanda	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Mozambique	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Mauritius	1	0	0	1	1	7	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Mauritius v Moz'que; Rwanda v Ghana
2016
Mar 23-26 Ghana v Moz'que; Mauritius v Rwanda
Mar 26-29 Moz'que v Ghana; Rwanda v Mauritius
Jun 3-5 Mauritius v Ghana; Rwanda v Moz'que
Sep 2-4 Ghana v Rwanda; Moz'que v Mauritius

Group I

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sudan	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Ivory Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sierra Leone	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Sierra Leone v Ivory Coast
2016
Mar 23-26 Ivory Coast v Sudan
Mar 26-29 Sudan v Ivory Coast
Jun 3-5 Sierra Leone v Sudan
Sep 2-4 Ivory Coast v Sierra Leone

Group J

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP J	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Ethiopia	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Lesotho	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Seychelles	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Lesotho v Algeria; Seychelles v Ethiopia
2016
Mar 23-26 Algeria v Ethiopia; Seychelles v Lesotho
Mar 26-29 Ethiopia v Algeria; Lesotho v Seychelles
Jun 3-5 Lesotho v Ethiopia; Seychelles v Algeria
Sep 2-4 Algeria v Lesotho; Ethiopia v Seychelles

Group K

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP K	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Niger	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Namibia	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Burundi	1	0	0	1	1	3	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Burundi v Niger; Namibia v Senegal
2016
Mar 23-26 Burundi v Namibia; Senegal v Niger
Mar 26-29 Namibia v Burundi; Niger v Senegal
Jun 3-5 Burundi v Senegal; Namibia v Niger
Sep 2-4 Niger v Burundi; Senegal v Namibia

Group L

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP L	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Swaziland	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Zimbabwe	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Guinea	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Malawi	1	0	0	1	1	2	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Swaziland v Malawi; Zimbabwe v Guinea
2016
Mar 23-26 Guinea v Malawi; Swaziland v Zimbabwe
Mar 26-29 Malawi v Guinea; Zimbabwe v Swaziland
Jun 3-5 Swaziland v Guinea; Zimbabwe v Malawi
Sep 2-4 Guinea v Zimbabwe; Malawi v Swaziland

Group M

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GP M	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Gambia	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
South Africa	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mauritania	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Remaining fixtures
2015
Sep 4-6 Gambia v Cameroon; M'tania v S Africa
2016
Mar 23-26 Cameroon v S Africa; M'tania v Gambia
Mar 26-29 Gambia v M'tania; S Africa v Cameroon
Jun 3-5 Gambia v S Africa; M'tania v Cameroon
Sep 2-4 Cameroon v Gambia; S Africa v M'tania

● *The13 group winners and the 2 runners-up with the best record (excluding 3-team Group I) will qualify for the16-team finals. Hosts Gabon qualify automatically*

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round
1st legs - June 30/July1; 2nd legs - July 7
B36 (Far) v The New Saints (Wal)
1-2, 1-4 (agg 2-6)
Crusaders (NI) v Levadia Tallinn (Est)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Crusaders on away goals)
Lincoln Red Imps (Gib) v FC Santa Coloma (And)
0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1)
Pyunik (Arm) v Folgore (SaM)
2-1, 2-1 (agg 4-2)

2nd qualifying round
(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - July14/15; 2nd legs - July 21/22
APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) v Vardar Skopje (Mac)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, APOEL on away goals)
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Dundalk (RoI)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Celtic (Sco) v Stjarnan (Ice)
2-0, 4-1 (agg 6-1)
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) v Fola Esch (Lux)
1-1, 3-0 (agg 4-1)
Hibernians (Mlt) v Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr)
2-1, 1-5 (agg 3-6)
Ludogorets (Bul) v Milsami (Mol)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Malmo (Swe) v Zalgiris Vilnius (Lit)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Maribor (Sln) v Astana (Kaz)
1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Midtjylland (Den) v Lincoln Red Imps
1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)
Molde (Nor) v Pyunik
5-0, 0-1 (agg 5-1)
Partizan Belgrade (Ser) v Dila Gori (Geo)
1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)
Qarabag (Aze) v Rudar Pljevlja (Mne)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Sarajevo (Bos) v Lech Poznan (Pol)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Skenderbeu (Alb) v Crusaders
4-1, 2-3 (agg 6-4)
The New Saints v Videoton (Hun)
0-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 1-2)
Trencin (Slk) v Steaua Bucharest (Rom)
0-2, 3-2 (agg 3-4)
Ventspils (Lat) v HJK Helsinki (Fin)
1-3, 0-1 (agg 1-4)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round
1st legs - June 30/July 2; 2nd legs - July 7/9
Airbus UK (Wal) v Lokomotiva Zagreb (Cro)
1-3, 2-2 (agg 3-5)
Aktobe (Kaz) v Nomme Kalju (Est)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Alashkert (Arm) v St Johnstone (Sco)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Alashkert on away goals)
Atlantas (Lit) v Beroe (Bul)
0-2, 1-3 (agg 1-5)
Balzan (Mlt) v Zeljeznicar (Bos)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Birkirkara (Mlt) v Ulisses (Arm)
0-0, 3-1 (agg 3-1)
Botosani (Rom) v Tskhinvali (Geo)
1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
Brondby (Den) v Juvenes/Dogana (SaM)
9-0, 2-0 (agg 11-0)
Buducnost Podgorica (Mne) v Spartaks Jurmala (Lat)
1-3, 0-0 (agg 1-3)
Celje (Sln) v Slask Wroclaw (Pol)
0-1, 1-3 (agg 1-4)
Cork City (RoI) v KR (Ice)
1-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 2-3)
Debrecen (Hun) v Sutjeska (Mne)
3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)
Differdange (Lux) v Bala (Wal)
3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3)
Dinamo Batumi (Geo) v Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) v Qabala (Aze)
2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Domzale (Sln) v Cukaricki (Ser)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Europa (Gib) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk)
0-6, 0-3 (agg 0-9)
Flora Tallinn (Est) v Rabotnicki (Mac)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Glenavon (NI) v Shakhtyor (Bls)
1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5)
Glentoran (NI) v Zilina (Slk)
1-4, 0-3 (agg 1-7)
Go Ahead Eagles (Hol) v Ferencvaros (Hun)
1-1, 1-4 (agg 2-5)
Jelgava (Lat) v Litex Lovech (Bul)
1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Jelgava on away goals)
Kruoja (Lit) v Jagiellonia (Pol)
0-1, 0-8 (agg 0-9)
Kukesi (Alb) v Torpedo Zhodino (Bls)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
La Fiorita (SaM) v Vaduz (Lie)
0-5, 1-5 (agg 1-10)
Laci (Alb) v Inter Baku (Aze)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Inter Baku on away goals)
Lahti (Fin) v Elfsborg (Swe)
2-2, 0-5 (agg 2-7)
Linfield (NI) v NSI (Far)
2-0, 3-4 (agg 5-4)
MTK Budapest (Hun) v Vojvodina (Ser)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Neftchi (Aze) v Mladost Podgorica (Mne)
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Mladost on away goals)
Newtown (Wal) v Valletta (Mlt)
2-1, 2-1 (agg 4-2)
Olimpic Sarajevo (Bos) v Spartak Trnava (Slk)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Spartak Trnava on away goals)
Ordabasy (Kaz) v Beitar Jerusalem (Isr)
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
Progres (Lux) v Shamrock Rovers (RoI)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Red Star Belgrade (Ser) v Kairat (Kaz)
0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
Renova (Mac) v Dacia (Mol)
0-1, 1-4 (agg 1-5)
Sant Julia (And) v Randers (Den)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Saxan (Mol) v Apollon (Cyp)
0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4)
Seinajoki (Fin) v FH (Ice)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Sheriff Tiraspol (Mol) v Odd (Nor)
0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3)
Shirak Gyumri (Arm) v Zrinjski (Bos)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Shkendija (Mac) v Aberdeen (Sco)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Aberdeen on away goals)
Sillamae (Est) v Hajduk Split (Cro)
1-1, 2-6 (agg 3-7)
Skonto Riga (Lat) v St Patrick's Athletic (RoI)
2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1)
Stromsgodset (Nor) v Partizani (Alb)
3-1, 1-0 (agg 4-1)
Trakai (Lit) v HB (Far)
3-0, 4-1 (agg 7-1)
UCD (RoI) v F91 Dudelange (Lux)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, UCD on away goals)
Vikingur Gota (Far) v Rosenborg (Nor)
0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)
Vikingur Reykjavik (Ice) v Koper (Sln)
0-1, 2-2 (agg 2-3)
VPS (Fin) v AIK Stockholm (Swe)
2-2, 0-4 (agg 2-6)
West Ham United (Eng) v Lusitans (And)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)

2nd qualifying round
(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - July16; 2nd legs - July 21/23
AIK Stockholm v Shirak Gyumri
2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Apollon v Trakai 4-0, 0-0 (agg 4-0)
Beroe v Brondby 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Charleroi (Blg) v Beitar Jerusalem (Isr)
5-1, 4-1 (agg 9-2)
Cherno More (Bul) v Dinamo Minsk (Bls)
1-1, 0-4 (agg 1-5)
Copenhagen (Den) v Newtown
2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)
Cukaricki v Qabala 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Dacia v Zilina 1-2, 2-4 (agg 3-6)
Ferencvaros v Zeljeznicar 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
FH v Inter Baku 1-2, 2-2 (aet) (agg 3-4)
Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) v Thun (Swi)
1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Inverness (Sco) v Astra (Rom) 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)

Jagiellonia v Omonia Nicosia 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Jelgava v Rabotnicki 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Kairat v Alashkert 3-0, 1-2 (agg 4-2)
Koper v Hajduk Split 3-2, 1-4 (agg 4-6)
KR v Rosenborg 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Kukesi v Mladost Podgorica 0-1, 4-2 (agg 4-3)
Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Botosani
1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0)
Lokomotiva Zagreb v PAOK Salonika (Gre)
2-1, 0-6 (agg 2-7)
Mlada Boleslav (CzR) v Stromsgodset
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Stromsgodset on away goals)
Randers v Elfsborg 0-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 0-1)
Rijeka (Cro) v Aberdeen 0-3, 2-2 (agg 2-5)
Shakhtyor v Wolfsberger (Aut) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Shamrock Rovers v Odd 0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
Skonto Riga v Debrecen 2-2, 2-9 (agg 4-11)
Slask Wroclaw v IFK Gothenburg (Swe)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Slovan Bratislava v UCD 1-0, 5-1 (agg 6-1)
Spartak Trnava v Linfield 2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
Trabzonspor (Tur) v Differdange
1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Vaduz v Nomme Kalju 3-1, 2-0 (agg 5-1)
Vojvodina v Spartaks Jurmala 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)
West Ham United v Birkirkara
1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, West Ham 5-3 on pens)

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs

July14
River Plate (Arg) 2 (Mercado 60, Mora 73)
Guarani (Par) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fedorczuk (Uru)

July15
Internacional (Bra) 2 (D'Alessandro 5, Valdivia 10)
Tigres (Mex) 1 (Ayala 23)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)
Sent off: Ayala (Tigres) 58

2nd legs

July 21
Guarani 1 (Fernandez 61)
River Plate 1 (Alario 79)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bascunan (Chl)
River Plate 3-1 on agg

July 22
Tigres 3 (Gignac 18, Geferson og 41, Arevalo 56)
Internacional 1 (Lopez 89)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Vera (Ecu)
Tigres 4-3 on agg

Final

1st leg

July 29
Tigres 0
River Plate 0
Ref: Arias (Par)
Tigres: Guzman - Jimenez, Juninho, Ayala (Rivas 41), Torres Nilo, Arevalo (Duenas 71), Pizarro, Damm, Rafael Sobis, Alvarez, Gignac.
River Plate: Barovero - Mercado, Maidana, Funes Mori, Vangioni, Sanchez, Ponzio (Gonzalez 77), Kranevitter, Viudez (Martinez 46), Alario, Mora (Bertolo 46).

2nd leg

Aug 5
River Plate 3 (Alario 45, Sanchez pen 75, Funes Mori 79)
Tigres 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
River Plate 3-0 on agg
River Plate: Barovero - Mayada, Maidana, Funes Mori, Vangioni, Kranevitter (Gonzalez 82), Ponzio, Sanchez, Bertolo, Alario (Driussi 69), Cavenaghi (Pisculichi 77).
Tigres: Guzman - Jimenez (Guerron 77), Juninho, Rivas, Torres Nilo, Arevalo (Duenas 65), Pizarro, Damm, Rafael Sobis, Aquino, Gignac.

Previous winners (most recent)

2007	Boca Juniors (Arg)
2008	LDU Quito (Ecu)
2009	Estudiantes (Arg)
2010	Internacional (Bra)
2011	Santos (Bra)
2012	Corinthians (Bra)
2013	Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
2014	San Lorenzo (Arg)

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round draw

Juventud (Uru) v Real Potosi (Bol) (1)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) v Nacional (Uru) (2)
Santiago Wanderers (Chl) v Libertad (Par) (3)
Nacional (Par) v
Universidad Concepcion (Chl) (4)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) v Bolivar (Bol) (5)
Universidad Catolica (Chl) v Danubio (Uru) (6)
Olimpia (Par) v Huachipato (Chl) (7)
Aurora (Bol) v Sportivo Luqueno (Par) (8)
Carabobo (Ven) v Tolima (Col) (9)
Universidad Catolica (Ecu) v
La Guaira (Ven) (10)
Leon (Per) v Emelec (Ecu) (11)
Junior (Col) v Melgar (Per) (12)
Universitario (Per) v Anzoategui (Ven) (13)
Zamora (Ven) v LDU Quito (Ecu) (14)
Aguilas Doradas (Col) v
Union Comercio (Per) (15)
LDU Loja (Ecu) v Santa Fe (Col) (16)
1st legs - Aug11-13; 2nd legs - Aug18-20

2nd round draw

Arsenal (Arg) v Independiente (Arg)
Bahia (Bra) v Sport Recife (Bra)
Belgrano (Arg) v Lanus (Arg)
Brasilia (Bra) v Goias (Bra)
Joinville (Bra) v Atletico Paranaense (Bra)
Ponte Preta (Bra) v Chapecoense (Bra)
Tigre (Arg) v Huracan (Arg)
Winner (2) v Winner (16)
Winner (5) v Winner (13)
Winner (6) v Winner (3)
Winner (7) v Winner (15)
Winner (9) v Winner (12)
Winner (10) v Winner (8)
Winner (11) v Winner (1)
Winner (14) v Winner (4)

Bye to 3rd round: *River Plate (Arg; holders)*

ECUADOR

2015 – 1ST STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito[1]	22	13	8	1	28	10	47
Emelec	22	13	6	3	41	18	45
Independiente	22	12	6	4	35	24	42
Barcelona[2]	22	10	3	9	33	24	32
Dep Quito	22	7	8	7	33	37	29
El Nacional	22	8	4	10	28	24	28
River Plate	22	7	5	10	27	32	26
Mushuc Runa	22	7	5	10	25	38	26
Dep Cuenca	22	5	8	9	25	37	23
Aucas	22	5	7	10	32	34	22
Univ Catolica	22	5	6	11	22	31	21
LDU Loja[3]	22	5	4	13	17	37	16

[1] 1st stage winners LDU Quito will meet the 2nd stage winners in the 2015 Championship Final
[2] 1pt deducted for not presenting wage payment details in time
[3] 3pts deducted for fielding an ineligible player

CONCACAF

ARUBA

2014-15 Championship Final

1st leg -July 7; 2nd leg -July10
Estrella v Racing Club 2-2, 0-3
Racing Club are champions; the Championship Final goes to a 3rd leg only if both teams have each won1 of the first 2 legs

BARBADOS

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BDF (C)	18	12	2	4	48	15	38
Rendezvous	18	12	2	4	43	20	38
BlackBirds	18	10	4	4	38	17	34
Weymouth W	18	8	7	3	36	17	31
Brittons Hill	18	9	3	6	33	30	30
Paradise	18	7	2	9	29	31	23
Notre Dame	18	6	1	11	24	38	19
Pinelands	18	5	3	10	27	63	18
P Gall Hill (R)	18	4	1	13	17	34	13
S'ver Sands (R)	18	3	3	12	17	47	12

ST KITTS

2014-15 Championship Final

1st leg -July 25; 2nd leg -July 28
Conaree v St Paul's United 1-3, 0-1
St Paul's win 2 legs to 0 (Final was best of 3 legs)

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Al Hilal (Sau) v Lekhwiya (Qat)
Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) v Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) v
Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Naft Tehran (Irn) v Al Ahli (UAE)
1st legs - Aug 25/26; 2nd legs - Sep15/16

AFC CUP

Quarter-finals draw

Istiklol (Taj) v Pahang (Mly)
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly) v South China (HK)
Kuwait SC (Kuw) v Kitchee (HK)
Qadsia SC (Kuw) v Al Jaish (Syr)
1st legs - Aug 25/26; 2nd legs - Sep15/16

IRAQ

2014-15 Championship Final

July11
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 0 Naft Al Wasat 0
(aet, Naft Al Wasat 6-5 on pens)

MACAU

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica (C)	18	15	2	1	76	9	47
Windsor Arch	18	15	1	2	71	16	46
Chao Pak Kei	18	11	2	5	50	28	35
Monte Carlo	18	11	2	5	39	14	35
Sporting	18	10	4	4	41	24	34
Lai Chi	18	5	4	9	26	42	19
Policia	18	4	3	11	17	40	15
Chuac Lun	18	4	2	12	17	70	14
Casa P'gal (R)	18	3	3	12	22	66	12
Developm't (R)	18	0	1	17	8	58	1

AFRICA

CAPE VERDE

2015 Championship Final

1st leg -July 4; 2nd leg -July11
Mindelense v Derby 1-1, 1-1 (aet)
(agg 2-2, Mindelense 4-3 on pens)

MAURITIUS

2014-15 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cercle J (C)	36	22	9	5	62	24	75
ASPL 2000	36	21	10	5	67	30	73
Pamplem'sses	36	18	5	13	56	42	59
C Starlight[1]	36	17	7	12	59	52	57
P Riv're Noire[1]	36	18	3	15	53	46	56
Riv Rempart[2]	36	11	12	13	51	53	43
Q'tre Bornes[1]	36	10	9	17	30	42	38
Chamarel	36	9	8	19	40	65	35
Cure Sy'ter (R)	36	8	10	18	38	51	34
Entente BR (R)	36	5	9	22	52	103	24

[1] 1pt deducted
[2] 2pts deducted

SENEGAL

2014-15 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AS Douanes (C)	26	11	10	5	30	19	43
Niarry Tally	26	10	13	3	34	23	43
Suneor	26	12	6	8	27	26	42
Diambars	26	10	9	7	26	18	39
Stade Mbour	26	11	6	9	26	27	39
Casa Sport	26	9	10	7	22	17	37
M Petite Cote	26	8	11	7	26	21	35
Ouakam	26	8	9	9	25	22	33
Linguere	26	7	12	7	30	33	33
Guediawaye	26	7	10	9	24	25	31
Jaraaf	26	7	8	11	27	31	29
Olympique	26	6	10	10	22	27	28
Pikine (R)	26	6	10	10	17	26	28
Port Aut'e (R)	26	4	8	14	14	35	20

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

August 2015 Vol 55 No 12

EDITOR Gavin Hamilton
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DESIGN DIRECTOR Kevin Eason
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Thanks this issue to
Dean Chillmaid, Debbie Millett, Peter Neish, Dave Rallis

EDITORIAL
Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU
Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 4817
Fax: +44 (0) 20 3148 8130

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Kerry Edmondson
Tel: +44 (0) 20 3148 2515
+44 (0) 20 3148 2823
E-mail: kerry.edmondson@timeinc.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Tom Jennings
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Hamish Dawson
MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Williams

Advertising +44 (0) 20 3148 2503
+44 (0) 20 3148 2823
Back issues +44 (0) 20 3148 4816
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International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 314 85490
E-mail: bianca.hamilton-foster@timeinc.com

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Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT
Rockwood House, 9-17 Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 3DH, England Tel: +44 (0) 1444 475 675

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JUNE 23, 1984, MARSEILLE: EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP SEMI-FINAL

France 3 Portugal 2

Michel Platini inspires *'Les Bleus'* to success on home soil in the 1984 European Championship

Winner...Platini puts France in the Final

In what *World Soccer* called "the best tournament since the 1970 World Cup", Keir Radnedge said of the Euro 84 semi-final in Marseille's Velodrome: "The match between France and Portugal was one of THE great games."

He began his report by writing: "Given the demands, pressures and prizes of top tournaments, it is amazing that players can produce football of such quality with the most demanding of audiences breathing down their necks."

It was an enthralling game, with the lead changing hands on three occasions. France struck first with a free-kick from Jean-Francois Domergue after most people in Marseille thought Michel Platini was lining up a shot. Portugal then equalised through Rui Jordao.

Jordao scored again, near the end of the first period of extra-time, to put Portugal ahead for the first time, but France were not going to surrender easily.

"With barely a pause for breath, we roared into the second period of extra-time," continued Radnedge. "The atmosphere was so infectious that the Portuguese forgot about slowing down the game. And thus they played into French hands."

With just six minutes remaining, Domergue scored his second goal of the game after some intricate work by Platini and Yvon Le Roux – the big central defender who had been sent upfield by coach Michel Hidalgo.

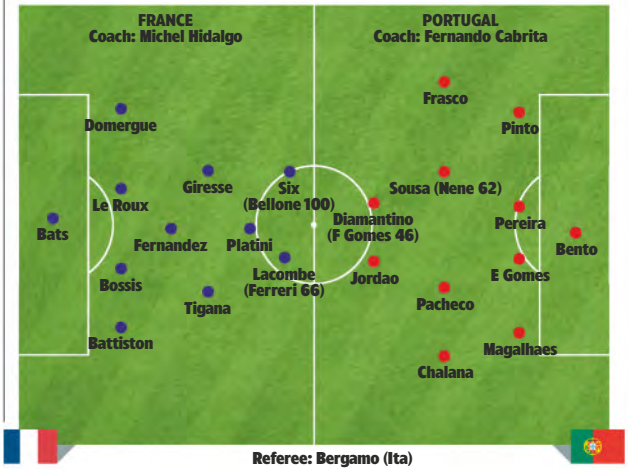
France kept pushing forward and with the game entering its final minute, Jean Tigana and Platini gave them their reward.

"Tigana went on one last wriggling slalom through the Portugal defence," concluded Radnedge. "He took the ball on and on, right past the goalkeeper to the byline before pulling it back.

"And there was Platini, superstar supreme, to control the ball, assure his own balance and fire into the back of the net for a most dramatic winner to a most remarkable game of football."

France went on to win the Final, beating Spain 2-0 in Paris with goals from Platini and Bruno Bellone. WS

Victors...Giresse (left) and Six



Referee: Bergamo (Ita)

KEY MOMENTS

Opener...Domergue's free-kick beats Bento

24 min Michel Platini is fouled just outside the penalty area and Jean-Francois Domergue steps up to power home the free-kick, courtesy of a Joao Pinto deflection. **1-0**

34 min A well-worked Portugal move leads to Rui Jordao having a shot on the turn, but he doesn't trouble Joel Bats in the French goal.

46 min Luis Fernandez is put through by Platini but his shot rolls inches wide of the post.

48 min Manuel Bento tips a 25-yard shot from Alain Giresse over the bar and then dives bravely at the same player's feet to save again following Platini's defence-splitting pass from the resulting corner.

73 min Pinto crosses from the left and Fernando Chalana clips a pass for Jordao to head home. **1-1**

80 min Bento pushes a follow-up shot from Didier Six onto the bar after first saving at Platini's feet.

97 min Jordao is again set up by Chalana and scores with a volley. **1-2**

114 min Domergue starts and finishes the move, passing to Yvon Le Roux, who plays in Platini, who feeds Domergue to put France on level terms. **2-2**

119 min A brilliant run by Jean Tigana takes him beyond Bento before he crosses for Platini to fire home the winner. **3-2**

Level...Jordao is lifted up by a team-mate

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